From Skin to Scales by AppleScentedLazers

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Summary:

It was still Danny, even if he looked like an extra from a mermaid-obsessed teen girl’s wet dream. Sharp teeth, finned tail, the whole nine-yards. They would figure this out the same way they figured everything else out; together. And, if they couldn’t figure it out, then

they could always run away from their problems. That definitely wouldn't have any negative consequences at all.

Or swim, in Danny's case. Or perhaps flop? It's not like Danny could swim on dry land, so—

"I have a feeling whatever you're thinking right now is extremely unhelpful," Danny's sardonic voice cut through his musings. He was still staring hopelessly at his newly elongated canines in the bathroom mirror.

"Oh, it was," Tucker pushed aside the mental picture of Danny flopping around his house like a beached whale, "very extremely not helpful. But in my defense, it's not every day a person's best friend turns into a fish-man."

Or, a Danny Phantom Mermaid AU for MerMay. Includes bad fish puns, fishy transformations, and the worst secret identity-keeping the world has ever seen.

Relationships: Danny Fenton/Sam Manson
Comments: 153
Kudos: 300

1. Of Fishy Origin Stories

Daniel James Fenton *hated* the ocean.

Hated lakes, pools, lagoons, rivers, streams, the whole nine-yards. Any body of water larger than his bathtub was public enemy number one.

You would think that with such a deep-seated hate of the ocean Danny would be living up on a mountain, impossibly high above sea-level with the only moisture being monthly precipitation.

You would be wrong.

For as long as he could remember (and probably longer), the Fenton's had called Amity Park home. The problem with this was that Amity just so happened to straddle the Atlantic Ocean, supposedly because it had once been a bustling port full of eager fishermen.

This in mind, water was an integral part of living in Amity. Rumor was that ocean salt ran through their very veins, instead of blood.

Danny, personally, thought the only thing running through the veins of Amity Park locals was spite and caffeine.

Either way, if someone in Amity didn't take to swimming, they surfed. And if they didn't surf, they boated or dived or fished or snorkeled. And, if they did none of the above, they at least enjoyed long walks on the beach.

Meaning that if a local family so happened to throw a beach party on their own very private—and very large—swathe of sand, no matter how weird they were, everybody showed up.

Which is why Danny now sat alone on the last night of after-exams-second term-break, his bare toes digging into the wet sand and his mouth set in an unforgiving frown.

Thirty or so feet away, silhouetted by the lights of his invaded home, was what looked like Amity's entire populace. Laughter and loud voices carried over the lapping waves, painting a picture of smiles

and games and good times. His mom and dad were celebrating some new research bursary and had pulled out all the stops.

Flirtatious squeals broke through the lull every now and then, representing the crowd's more adolescent members who had made a game of throwing each other headlong into the surf.

He glared at the water as if it had personally offended him—which, in a way, it had—and pulled up a fistful of grainy sand, half-heartedly chucking it into the ocean.

It plopped beneath the surface, instantly swallowed by the dark frothing foam.

He was just about to gather another handful when laughter, now much closer, sounded from his left. The boy spun sharply, wincing when he saw a stumbling pack of teenagers coming towards him across the beach.

The A-Listers.

Stealing a glance to his left, he wondered if there was enough time to run before he was spotted. Maybe if he made it to the tidal pool, he could hide in the—

"F-Fffenturd!"

So much for that idea.

Deciding that facing his newest problem head on was better than cowering, he turned towards it. "Dash."

The blond jock and his posse quickly surrounded Danny, like wolves circling a lost lamb.

"We're missing you at the party, Dann-ny." Paulina slurred; her weight being supported entirely by Kwan's broad shoulders. She waved a half empty bottle at him, no doubt the cause of her stumbling. "We wanted to get you drunk."

Knowing his parents and their policies about beachside safety, the alcohol probably wasn't one of their provided beverages. More likely

the teens had smuggled it in themselves.

Dash, wearing only Hawai'ian print swim trunks that left entirely too little to the imagination—seriously, Danny was officially scarred for life—plopped down beside him, "Why aren't you over there, man? We need another dunkee."

"Shh!" Star shushed loudly from the darkness, "you weren't supposed to tell him that part. It was secrettt."

"Secret!" Paulina screeched gleefully into Kwan's ear, causing the boy to grimace.

Both girls were wearing cut off shorts, sand clinging to their bare legs. They were also wearing matching bikini tops, the wire shape of which looked a little uncomfortable, if Danny was being totally honest.

Danny-from-a-couple-years-ago might've blushed, maybe gotten flustered, but his crush from back in elementary school was long gone. He'd liked Paulina for about a year, and she'd even asked him out once. Eventually it came to light that she'd confessed to him as part of a dare, and any feelings Danny thought he'd harboured had hit a semi-truck, died, and splattered spectacularly against the windshield.

Now, he had a policy against crushing on fundamentally horrible people.

Stood-up date and a few nasty texts later, Danny had finally come to terms with the fact that he would be single for the entirety of his high school career. Possibly forever.

Speaking of nastiness, he noticed there was a member missing from their usual group. "Where's Samantha?"

Paulina scoffed, dramatically rolling her eyes at his question, "*Please*. If it weren't for the fact that she was rich, we would've cut her off ages ago. She never has time for anything anymore."

"That's right," Star nodded, striking an unsteady pose, "Such an amazing professional swimmer can't hang around us *lowly worms*."

She made derisive air quotes around the word ‘amazing’.

Danny nodded, even though he personally couldn’t care less about the snake-like politics of the A-Listers. They all seemed to take turns stabbing each other in the back. “Cool. Enjoy the party, I guess.” He pushed himself up to his feet and made to leave, only to have a large, tanned hand seize his arm.

“Not so fast, Fentina,” Dash stood, towering over Danny by at least a foot. “You’re our dunkee, remember?”

No. Danny was not going anywhere near that stupid ocean. He tried to wrench his hand out of the other boy’s grip, but it remained caught, Dash’s too-warm fingers probably leaving a bruise.

“L-let go. You’re drunk.” He ignored the way his voice tremored and focused on weaseling out of Dash’s grasp.

“What?” Paulina cackled from the behind them, “Scared of a little water, Danny?”

“Yes,” he said without hesitating, the opaque darkness of the waves too close for comfort as Dash continued to push him forward.

They all laughed this time, Kwan even slapping at his own toned thighs. “What kind of coward is scared of a little water? Or can you not swim?”

Star caught onto the narrative, adding her two cents with a smirk, “Is that why you get a pass whenever we do swim segments in gym? Cause you’re too *traumatized* to doggy paddle?”

The group laughed, the sound blending with the echo of crashing waves.

Danny was shaking in earnest now. “Seriously, put me down Dash. Or I swear I’ll—”

“What? Get your freak parents to lock me up in one of their freak-tanks?” The blond hoisted Danny into the air, arms wrapped tightly around Danny’s scrawny waist. “I think I’ll take my chances.”

Danny's next words of protest were snatched away by the wind as Dash waded out into the waves, the water splashing around them with malicious glee.

Probably not malicious glee, but it certainly looked that way from Danny's perspective.

"Ready?" Dash roared over the waves, the drunken cheers of his friends on shore hyping him up even more.

"Please—" Danny tried to speak one more time but was interrupted by the sudden sensation of weightlessness. Before he even had time to register that he was in the air, gravity had already taken hold, his body smacking against the rough waters at an odd angle.

The pain was suddenly inconsequential as he found himself surrounded on all sides by the ocean, that too familiar bitter, salty taste rushing into his still-open mouth.

He coughed, eyes watering as the acidic after-taste burned his esophagus. Inhaling salt water was never fun, yet another reason to hate the ocean.

Fortunately it was shallow enough to stand, which he quickly did.

His heart was jackrabbiting in his chest, fingers bloodless and pale where he was pressing them against his ribs. His mind had checked out somewhere between Dash's hand clamping around his wrist and his weightless flight into the ocean.

The waves crashed against his back as he stood, trembling, in the waist deep water. His khaki shorts and white-red tee clung to his skin, the warm night air suddenly seeming a heck of a lot colder.

The group on shore were laughing, the flash of a phone light making him guess they'd recorded it all.

Though he didn't want to be in the water any longer than was humanly possible, he also knew that going back to shore would just get him dunked again. And he didn't—he *couldn't* get grabbed and thrown again. He couldn't.

With a heavy, bone wracking shudder, he began to stride through the water away from the party, the lights, his parents, and the stupid A-Listers.

The waves pressed and pulled against his legs, trying to lull him into their embrace, but he ignored the call. He meant it when he said he was done with water. He didn't know why everyone kept trying to push him—literally, in this case—back towards it.

Finally, Danny reached the Amity Pier, landmarking the beginning of public property and the end of the Fenton's private beach.

He pulled himself up out of the water using the algae covered ladder, being extra careful not to slip on its slimy rungs.

He did not want to end up in the water again.

Letting out the breath he'd been holding, he leaned back on the wet wood with his feet still hooked on the upper rungs. Thank goodness. He would kiss the boards of the pier if they weren't so…nasty looking. Seriously, was that a dead fish lying on the wood? Or a pair of twisted up boxer shorts? Either way, *gross*.

He stared up at the stars above, smiling when he recalled his old dream of becoming an astronaut. Now, with his grades, he'd be lucky to even graduate. The teachers had been lenient at first after everything that'd happened, but there was only so much they could do before their patience wore thin.

Pushing himself up from the pier, he slowly got to his feet, laughing softly at the vaguely humanoid shape his sopping clothes and hair had left behind. Casting his eyes to the end of the pier, he felt his heart constrict at the familiar sight of the ocean there.

It still had the audacity to continue on, even after everything it'd done.

Groaning, he turned his back on the open sea and squelched his way to the sand again, hopping off the pier and almost falling flat on his face when his wet clothes weighed him down. The laughter of the party could hardly be heard above the softly lapping waves, so Danny

decided to keep moving.

Hopefully, if he went far enough away, he could finally get some peace and quiet.

Separating the two stretches of Amity Park's main beach was a huge rock formation, perfect for cliff jumping or rock climbing. It was this towering natural occurrence that Danny headed towards, his feet slipping in the sand as he tried to maintain his balance on its shifting surface.

It was what lay in the shadow of the rock that few, if any, knew about.

The tidal pool.

Jazz had discovered it a couple years back, before everything went downhill, and dubbed it her special practice spot. It wasn't until Danny came home crying in middle school because Dash was being, well, himself, that his older sister had finally showed it to him.

The thin path was concealed by the beachside shrubs and trees that popped up around the cliffs, their long fronds creating what appeared to be nothing but forest from the outside.

However, if one braved past their trunks and leafy boughs, they would discover it.

Danny pushed aside the branches and trod down the narrow path, instantly relaxing in the secret-stillness of his surroundings. Before him was a rocky pool, slightly larger in size than Leviathan High's—Amity Park's only public high school. The water in it was deep and clear, connected by a thin channel to the sea.

On one side were the cliffs and on the other was the forest, making it a quiet and secluded spot. He guessed that's why Jazz had always loved training here instead of the open water, less curious and spiteful eyes trying to learn her surf routine.

Above the pool was a smaller rock formation, sticking out from the cliffs and overlooking the glassy surface. It was this that the younger Danny would have sat on, cheering on his sister and rating her moves

out of ten.

His heart clenched. Coming here hadn't been as relaxing as he'd hoped and he turned away, fixing his gaze on the channel and stopping short in surprise.

There was something green and—*glowing* down by the rocks in front of the sea, speckles of it spattered around what looked like a small log half buried in the sand.

Danny battled with himself for a moment, not sure if he should turn back or move closer.

He glanced at the direction he'd come from, mind filling with images of the A-Listers grinning faces. It's not like he could go home anyway, might as well check out whatever weird phenomenon was taking place. Maybe he would discover a new type of algae and they'd give him an award, then he could call it something stupid. Like '*Genus Goopicus*', or '*Genus Dash-Sucketh*s'.

After all, what's the worst that could happen?

He slowly made his way toward it, ready to bolt back to the tidal pool the second anything started going wrong.

A heavy grey cloud moved in front of the half-moon, casting shadows beneath the trees. Danny ignored the increased beating of his heart and bent down low to the sand, staring at the glowing green slime that covered it.

There was a lot of it, its acidic green colour casting an eery glow onto his darkened surroundings.

Was it some kind of bioluminescent creature? A washed-up jellyfish? He'd never seen anything like it and his parents used to have all kinds of specimens around the house, back when they were still highly esteemed marine biologists and not a couple cracked mermaid hunters.

Moving closer to the lump in the sand, he scratched at the skin of his neck as he stared at the green stuff that seemed to be oozing out of the log. Was it some kind of weird wood bug? Or—

The cloud that had been obscuring the moon finally passed, filling the clearing with light again and revealing the sallow, sunken face of a person. Of a *body*, a very-much dead looking human body.

Danny leapt back, stumbling over his own feet and landing on his butt in the sand. He cursed as he crab-walked backwards on his hands, sand flying up around him.

The log was most definitely not a log, which became all too clear as the corpse—as the *thing* opened its eyes and stared at him.

It was a girl.

Or, at least, half of one.

Attached to what looked like an average middle-schooler was a long, fish-like tail. The moonlight caught on the scales and made them shimmer, creating a breathtaking effect that Danny was far too panicked to appreciate.

The girl had tanned skin and elongated features, her petite face framed by pearlescent curls that resembled the inside of a clam shell. Silver, pink-green, and lustrous.

"No, no no no no no no *no*," He groaned, pressing his fingers against his face. "I'm crazy. I'm hallucinating." His parents' mad ramblings had gone to his head and now he was seeing things. "I should have accepted that school therapy while I had the chance."

When he opened his eyes again she was still there, struggling to sit up with a surprisingly human expression of pain on her face. If it weren't for her large, almost bulgy eyes and pointed ears, she could've passed for an eleven, maybe twelve-year-old little kid.

Now that she was sitting up, he could see that she wore some kind of armour formed for her upper body. Obviously it hadn't done its job, as there was a large hole that seemed to be the source of the pooling green sludge.

"Oh," Danny laughed somewhat hysterically, eyeing all the green around him. "It's blood."

The girl nodded, a necklace of what looked like fishbones rattling around her neck.

“Wait,” The youngest Fenton leaned closer, caution forgotten in his surprise. “You can understand me?”

He could’ve sworn she rolled her eyes before nodding, her face pulling into a grimace at the motion.

Danny slid across the sand towards her, eyeing the gaping hole in her stomach. The claws she had on each finger looked wicked, but her not being a crazy mermaid killing machine changed things. What if she needed help? As far as he knew, no one else even knew the tidal pool existed. “Hey, you need to go to a hospital. I don’t,” he swallowed, “I don’t know how to fix this and if this doesn’t get fixed, you’re going to die. Do you hear what I’m saying?”

She blinked an oscillating inner eyelid at him, gaze never leaving his face. It would’ve been eerie if she didn’t currently look so pathetic.

“Can you—do you not know what a hospital is?” He ran a hand through his hair. “It’s, well it’s this place where—"

With lightning fast reflexes, the girl reared forward as far as her limp tail would allow and seized his wrist. His vision flickered as her dark talons dug into his skin, blood beading from the pressure.

So much for her not being a crazy mermaid killing machine.

Except—except she *wasn’t* killing him. Just closing her eyes and leaning her head back, dark brows furrowed as her claws burrowed into his skin. It was hard to describe what came next. It felt like he was dreaming, or maybe more like someone was hitting rewind through his memories.

He stood above a tiny little cross made of popsicle sticks, tears and snot running down his six-year-old face as Jazz painstakingly belted out an offkey version of an old funeral march that would’ve made angels cry. From how bad it was, not from any kind of sadness. It was his goldfish’s funeral; the pet having died when Danny forgot to feed him for an entire week.

The scene changed again, showing the first time he'd met Tucker, when Dash was holding the other boy's beret out of reach and smirking insufferably. Danny's little legs had leapt into action, and he'd bolted forward, snatching the hat out of Dash's grip. He'd gotten his first black eye that day, but also met what would later become his best friend.

The memories sped up after that, showing different aspects of his life —most of which he wasn't too proud of. His first time riding a bike, his determination to get on the basketball team, his failure to get on the basketball team, his broken arm when Dash pushed him down a flight of stairs at school, his sprained ankle from a surfing incident, the time he accidentally shaved half his head.

Jazz, her hair gold-orange in the sun, freckles framing her green eyes as she showed him how to track his swim laps. He saw everything, all of it.

And suddenly he came to, mouth full of sand and his eyes oddly wet.

He jerked upwards, coughing the sand from his lungs. The girl was still there, her eyes impossibly huge as she stared at him. Her clawed hand was still wrapped around his fingers.

"What the—what did you just—"

I was looking at your memories.

The voice was in Danny's head, light, lilting, and obviously female. Also, terrifying. Extremely terrifying.

He placed his hands over his ears, heart beating in his throat. "How are you doing that?"

Telepathy. She wrinkled her nose, **How else do you expect us to speak under water?**

"That—" he cut himself off. Thought about it. "That actually makes a lot of sense."

Her smile revealed elongated canines, a thin stream of green blood dripping from her open mouth. Then she slumped forward, barely managing to catch herself before colliding with the beach.

“Are you alright?” He winced at the disapproving look she shot him. “Right, sorry. Stupid question.

Will you carry me?

“Carry you where?” He was still wary of her hands, their black talons catching the moonlight, but he knew there was no way he could save her. Even if they left now, they’d never make it in time to the nearest hospital.

And what was he supposed to do with a mermaid corpse? What if she died in his arms on the way there? What if they found him wandering the beach with a dead body? Everyone in Amity already thought he was crazy because of his parents; he didn’t need to add ‘murderer’ to his list of wrongdoings.

She weakly pointed towards the tidal pool, more glowing blood dripping from her mouth. It made for an extremely eerie picture, her child-like face far too serious in the darkness. **Will you carry me?**

Danny didn’t know if he was physically, let alone mentally, able to carry her, but something about the flint in her gaze made him pause. Consider.

“Shoot.” He muttered softly, stepping closer so he could wrap his arms around her upper body. He half expected her to bite his throat out, maybe shred his face like paper, but all the mermaid did was place her arms gently around his shoulders.

Her strange armour dug into his skin as he slid her across the sand, unable to lift her huge tail.

She wasn’t at all like what his parents had described. Ever since they’d first become self proclaimed ‘merhunters’ they’d painted pictures of vicious red eyes and gnashing teeth, rotten skin and bleeding eyes.

According to them, mermaids were vicious. Uncontrollable and uncontained. They made sharks look like teddy-bears.

This one was definitely not human, that much was clear, but she was nothing like the horror stories they’d told him his entire life.

After he'd managed to drag her to the edge of the tidal pool, he couldn't bring himself to step into it. He'd already been in the water once today and going in again would be too much. He was half contemplating if it would be so bad to just throw her in when one of her hands found its way into his hair.

Please, Danny. Her eyes stared into his, the same acidic green shade as her blood. Enflamed gills flared at her neck, weakly pulsing in time with the water below.

Closing his eyes, he waded into the water, feeling its coolness pressing against his skin and resisting the urge to vomit as hard terror coiled in his stomach. He was shaking so hard he was surprised he didn't drop her.

He came to a quick stop before it became too deep, letting the water carry her body out of his weak grasp.

Her tail floated below the surface, blending with the shadows that darkened the water's depths. She let out a relieved breath, eyes drifting closed as the water surrounded her. **I cannot thank you enough, chosen.**

Despite his fear, something about that sentence didn't click. "Chosen?"

Her eyes flickered open, half-lidded, ***My* chosen.** Her smile was much weaker now, just a slight turn of the lips.

More blood leaked out and he stumbled forward so he could press his fingers against the wound. Too bad school had never taught him the proper first-aid procedure for bleeding-out mermaids. "Wait, don't talk. You need a—a bandage, or a doctor, or—

I'm a mermaid, Danny. I do not think they'd want me in a hospital. Her gaze was amused and oddly affectionate as she caressed the side of his face, a sisterly affection. One he hadn't felt in a long time.

His eyes were wet, though he wasn't entirely why. A choking sob blocked his throat, but he quickly swallowed it.

Listen to me closely, she pulled his head closer, eyes inches from her own as she studied his face. **They need a hero. One for both the land and the sea.**

“Stop mind speaking, it’s tiring you out,” He pressed harder as more blood seeped out. There was too much of it fogging the water, too much glowing green around them as she laid a scaly hand against his cheek. “If I—”

I’ve accepted my fate, friend. Her eyes were soft as she moved her face towards his, and his vision suddenly flickered, the swirling green of her blood filling every corner of his vision. The last thing he felt was his forehead against hers, followed by a searing pain.

Danny had never been hit by lightning, but he imagined it felt something like this. Everything was white hot as he screamed, bones shifting and muscles tearing as energy coursed through his entire body and filled him to the point of overflowing.

Blackness moved in swiftly as the pain became too much, worse than anything he’d ever felt before. It felt like dying, like metamorphosis. Like seared nerve endings and new beginnings. The echo of her voice faded from his mind as he sank into unconsciousness,

We need a hero, Danny. For land and sea.

We need *you*.

2. Of Riled Emotions

Summary for the Chapter:

> Danny should really take his bleeding mermaid 'dreams' seriously. He doesn't. This action will have consequences.

When Danny came to, he thought he was dead.

He then realized that he was in far too much pain to be dead. If this was the afterlife, it was a real crummy one.

Groaning, he tried to blink his eyes open only to find they were crusted shut; sand and sleep weighing them down. His entire body throbbed like one giant bruise as he attempted to move, limbs protesting every motion.

He rolled over, muttering a few expletives as he spat sand out of his mouth.

Once he finally managed to sit up, throwing each ache and pain on the backburner of his mind, Danny realized that he was not in bed. Or in his house.

He was sprawled awkwardly at the edge of the tidal pool as if he'd been thrown there, one leg dipping into the clear water. Squawking, he quickly pulled it out and crabbed backwards until he was a safe distance away from the gently lapping ripples.

His head panged at the sudden movement and he couldn't help but wonder *what the actual hell* he'd done last night. It felt like how he imagined a hangover would: bleary eyes, weird pangs, and a killer headache. But he hadn't even gone to the party last night, let alone had anything alcoholic.

. . .Right?

Using a nearby rock as a sort of ladder, he managed to maneuver himself to his feet and take a few wobbly steps towards the path, wanting nothing more than to collapse back onto the sand. He looked

behind him only once, feeling like there should be something—or maybe someone?— floating in the water, but there was nothing. Just a calm tidepool.

When he reached the open beach, still moving at an agonizing pace, he took in the slow sunrise, its golden rays just beginning to peak over the horizon line. Pink clouds wandered across the scene, catching the morning light and refracting it like a stained-glass window.

Which was great and all, real pretty, but also an omen of his impending doom: because it meant he'd been out all night.

"My parents are going to kill me," He rubbed a dirty hand over his equally dirty face before a horrible thought struck him. "School!"

And then he was running haphazardly down the beach, sand flying up beneath his feet. Which were oddly bare. When had he lost his shoes?

In his disoriented state he'd completely forgotten it was his first day of the new semester. If he was late, Mr. Lancer would fillet him like a fish.

The Fenton house loomed before him and for once he ignored its gaudy front-lawn décor, instead throwing the screen door open and tearing down the hallway towards the stairs, running up them as fast as his wobbly legs would allow.

"DANN-O?" His dad's voice rang out from the kitchen, the scent of frying bacon wafting up towards him. "Is that you?"

"Y-yes," The youngest Fenton choked out as he threw his own door open, frantically beginning to search his floor for clean clothes.

"How was Tucker's?" His mother yelled, presumably from the kitchen as well. "I thought you were going to school together this morning?"

Tucker must have covered for him. Danny let out a relieved breath and silently blessed his friend's heart and soul. "Uh, yeah. I forgot my, uh, bag."

There were twin snorts of amusement from his parents, accompanied by the clattering of plates as one of them set the table.

Danny's stomach growled like a prehistoric beast as he yanked off his sand covered clothes, a fresh red hoodie and his least stained jeans taking their place.

Snatching up his backpack—that he still hadn't unpacked since the end of last semester, there was probably an entire ecosystem growing in there by now—he bounced back down the stairs and slid into the kitchen, his socked feet slipping over the tile.

"Good morning," He breathed out, quickly sliding into his usual seat at the table. The two older Fenton's were already seated, their glaringly bright wetsuits already in place despite the early morning hour.

Maddie's nose wrinkled as she surveyed her child, pausing in her decimation of the omelette on her plate to give him a once over, "Were you at the pier last night?"

Busying himself with loading up his plate so he didn't have to make eye contact with her, he pushed the memory of climbing onto the slimy wooden dock aside. "No, I know you guys don't like me going down there."

She seemed assured by his sentiment, though it was hard to tell through the tint of her ruby tinted goggle lenses, "Did you and Tucker go fishing or something? You kind of…"

"Stink!" Jack proclaimed with a wave of his fork. "You smell like rotting tuna."

Danny shrugged, then swallowed thickly, already moving in on his plate for another bite. He was starving for some reason. His stomach couldn't get enough of the simple breakfast.

It was while reaching across for his third helping that he noticed both his parents were smiling tearfully at him, their hands entwined over the table.

"Whaw?" He asked around his mouthful before scarfing it down all

the way. “Is there something wrong?”

Maddie dabbed at her eye, “It’s just been a long time since you’ve eaten so much.”

Jack nodded, blowing his nose on a spare napkin—no, wait, that was the tablecloth. Ew.

Danny winced guiltily at the relief in their eyes. Had they really been that worried? All this time he thought they hadn’t been paying attention, but. Maybe they had been?

“Would you look at the clock,” he said, his voice too loud in the sudden stillness. “Guess I should be heading to school.” He grabbed his bag and was heading toward the front door when a heavy hand landed on his shoulder.

“Just know that we’re here for you, son, if you ever need to talk.” Jack smiled, his wide face tilted expectantly.

“I know, dad.” He shuffled out from under his grip, going for an easy smile. Danny felt like he *should* talk; like there was something he was supposed to say in this situation, but he had no idea what that something was. “Um, see you later?”

That…probably wasn’t it.

“Bye, sweetie!” Maddie called from her place at the kitchen table, and then he was out the door.

The walk to school was just long enough that, by the time he arrived, he felt much more clearheaded. His parent’s unusual behaviour and the weirdness of last night no longer taking up as much space in his skull.

He slipped in through the large double doors and made his way towards his locker, ignored by the students around him. Though it was only their first year of high school, Amity Park was a small town, meaning that cliques and friend groups had already been well-established since kindergarten.

An energetic “Dude!” broke him out of his thoughts as someone

grabbed his shoulder, shaking him excitedly back and forth.

Danny slammed his locker door and smiled at his assaulter, “Jeez, Tuck, calm down.”

“*Calm down*? My best friend sneaks out for the night and you want me *calm*?” The boy pushed him backwards against the lockers, no real force behind the shove. “Your parents called me at, like, two in the morning asking if you were sleeping over.”

Danny winced, adjusting his backpack straps, “I’m sorry Tuck, I didn’t mean to put you on the spot like th—”

“Are you kidding? I don’t care about that,” The techno-geek waved his friend’s apology away with a toothy grin. “What’s the scoop? Why was Down-Low-Danny missing for five hours last night?”

Danny winced, both at the stupid nickname and his scattered memories of last night, “Don’t worry about it, ‘kay?”

Tucker gasped, holding a hand to his heart, “Was it a girl? Did Danny Fenton get some action?!”

The hallway’s other occupants fixed the two with venomous glares, muttering under their breath about ‘obnoxious nerds’.

“Keep your voice down, Tuck. I don’t want Dash hearing you.” Danny glanced around to make sure they were in the clear.

His friend’s eyebrows rose to his hairline, or where is hairline would be if he wasn’t wearing a hat, “You got some action with *Dash*? Unexpected, but I still support you all the sa—”

“No!” Danny shuddered. The thought of him and Dash was just—no. Absolutely not in this universe. “My parents had one of their fundraising parties last night.”

“Yeah, sorry I couldn’t be there, man.” Tuck bumped his shoulder before pulling out his new schedule, “My mom declared it family game time and you know how I get around Monopoly.”

Danny shrugged, “S’okay, you didn’t miss much. I wasn’t even there

to be honest."

Tucker's eyes narrowed into a suspicious glare at his friend's words, "You snuck off again."

It wasn't phrased as a question, but Danny nodded anyway, scratching at the back of his neck. "The A-Listers followed me, made me their dunkee."

Tucker actually squeaked, his head swivelling around towards Danny so fast he probably got whiplash, "Are you alright? Man, you should've led with that. Are you sure you're okay to—"

"I'm fine now, Tuck. No harm no foul or whatever." He pulled his crumpled class list from the back of his bag and compared it to Tucker's, frowning when they only shared three of their four classes. "I walked over to the pier after, and I guess I fell asleep."

Not even Tucker Foley, his best friend in the entire world, knew about the tidepool. Jazz had sworn him to secrecy all those years ago and even after everything that'd happened, Danny refused to break his vow.

"The pier?" Tucker gaped at him. "I don't blame you for not telling your parents. They would've put you under lock and key till graduation if they knew."

"I know," Danny rolled his eyes. "I did have this weird dream though."

"Weird dream?" Tucker waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

"Not that kind of weird dream, get your mind out of the gutter," He contemplated for a second, trying to separate the night's fictitious happenings from reality. "There was this mermaid at the beach, and she was bleeding green goop. I think she died or something? I don't know, it's still kind of fuzzy."

"Your parent's crazy career must be getting to you. That, or Dash hucking you into the ocean stirred up something. Here's what we'll do: me, you, and the new *Doomed* game, this Friday. Sound like a plan?"

Danny smiled, “You’re on.”

The next three classes passed in a boring blur. Danny had always hated first days with a passion. Actually, hated school in general with a passion.

His final class, the only one he didn’t share with Tucker, was Intro Literature. Pushing the door open he found the back two rows already occupied by the A-Listers, all of whom were snickering over something on Paulina’s phone.

Deciding that the horror of the front row was better then spending any extra time in their vicinity, he made his way to a window seat and plopped down, pillowing his head in his arms and sighing.

“Rough night, huh?”

The voice was gravelly—like its owner had just smoked a pack of cigarettes or swallowed a battle-axe—but decidedly feminine.

Curious as to which girl would be foolish enough to talk to the notoriously lame Danny Fenton, he raised his head.

Samantha Manson, Amity A-Lister and surfer extraordinaire, was staring at him with her vibrant violet eyes. They were framed by dark lashes, which in turn were silhouetted by smoky lids. Her chin-length hair hung flawlessly, barely grazing the tips of her shoulders.

An A-Lister was sitting next to him.

An *A-Lister*.

Was the world ending?

Maybe he really had died at the tidepool last night and this was all some kind of mad after-life hallucination.

Speechless, he felt his mouth pop open as she sat there, looking at him expectantly, as if waiting for something. Hold it, hadn’t she asked a question…?

“I said, *rough night?”* Her eyes narrowed into a pointed glare; purple

lips set in flat detachment.

“Uh, no.” His voice warbled oddly and he winced. He never had been a particularly good liar. Gathering the last shred of his dignity, he went for a casual side lean on his desk, “Why do you ask?”

She smirked at him, her eyes dancing with an unspoken *I know something you don’t know*. “It’s just that there’s this video trending of Dash throwing you into the ocean, thought you knew already.”

Danny felt his entire body seize at the reminder of what had happened, the all too familiar feeling of the water closing over his head sending tremors down his spine.

Fisting the front of his shirt in one of his hands, he turned his gaze to the black board. His heart was beating erratically in his chest and he forgot to breath. *Not now not now not now—*

“Pathetic.”

The single word held such venom that it startled him out of his panic, wide blue eyes swivelling towards the girl again.

“Excuse me?” He gasped, still breathless.

For a second, Danny thought she was referring to his almost-freakout. But then she shot him a dark glare, angry enough to melt the last bit of his courage.

“You heard me. Pathetic. I can’t believe you just—just *quit.* You could’ve been the best in Amity, gone national even.”

His mind was still in a fog. “What?”

“Surfing!” Undisguised anger flashed in her eyes, betraying a sense of raw emotion that he’d rarely seen her exhibit. “You quit, like a coward. Everyone knows the Fenton’s have talent, but it’s wasted in you.”

She was angry with him…over surfing? Because he quit surfing after his sister died? *That* surfing?

“Why do you care?” He shot back, adrenaline suddenly surging through his body. “I’ve never even had a conversation with you before.”

Something that sounded suspiciously like a growl echoed from the back of her throat. “That doesn’t matter! What does matter is that you’re throwing away talent, you’re not even *trying* anymore.”

He bristled. “My talent has nothing to do with you.”

“It has everything to do with me!” That same look was back in her eyes, an emotion he couldn’t recognize simmering in their depths. “I’ve worked hard every day of my life to be half as good as you and your sister, then you just stop. How’s that fair?”

Danny couldn’t tell if it was rage, fear, or sadness lingering there, but he decided he didn’t care. “Look, I’m sorry my laziness irks you or whatever. Does that make you feel better?”

“No!” Her shout drew the attention of the class, Danny’s neck prickling as he felt their stares level on him. “Just because your sister died doesn’t mean you can throw away all the time she put into training you. You don’t understand how—”

His eyes narrowed at her flippant mention of Jazz, the fist that had been balled in his shirt clenching on top of the desk. There had been a line somewhere back there, and Samantha Manson had definitely just stomped over it.

“Shut up,” Danny managed to squeeze out between taut lips. His whole body felt like it was thrumming with electricity, his tongue feeling oddly heavy in his mouth. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.

The spectating class was silent; a pin drop would’ve deafened them.

Something akin to remorse glinted in the goth girl’s eyes, but she quickly doused it in a wave of impassive dismissal. “I stand by what I said. You shouldn’t let your laziness get in the way of—”

Danny hadn’t even realized he’d stood up until he was turning to leave, not caring that his bag was still hanging on the back of his

chair. As he stalked out of the room, he thought he saw the flash of a phone pointed his way.

Great, more publicity.

A large, bald man entered the classroom, a light blue polo shirt containing his girth, “Good afternoon, class, please allow me to introduce myse—”

The youngest Fenton stormed by him, not even glancing in the man’s direction. He had to get out of this classroom before he did something stupid. Something he would definitely regret later.

Like punch a Manson in the face, or maybe pull out her teeth one by one and make her eat them.

“Young man, where do you think you’re going?” The man, presumably their teacher, called down the hallway after him. “The last bell has already—”

Danny turned around the corner, walking faster than he’d ever walked in his entire life. He didn’t know where he was going, just that he wanted away from them. Their watching eyes and pitying glances.

Taking another turn, he found himself in front of the school display case.

Littered among the various club announcements and sport’s awards was a plaque, emblazoned with false bronze writing and fixed in an oaken frame.

He pressed his too-sweaty palms against the glass, wishing he could reach through it and touch the only name adorning its surface.

School Memorial:

Beloved student, Jasmine Fenton, May 18, XXX0 - August 22, XX17

Taken from us far too soon.

Danny squatted there, ignoring the thrumming of his sore legs and

the racing of his heart. Pressing his forehead against the chilled glass, he squeezed his eyes shut to keep any stubborn tears from falling.

He wasn't sure how long he stayed like that. Frozen. Immobile. But it was more than enough time for his tears to dry.

3. Of Fishy Revelations

Summary for the Chapter:

> In which the Author makes Danny suffer. . .again. Oops!

Notes for the Chapter:

> Very vague allusions to past self-harm in this chapter, but they're not graphic and take up less than like, half a sentence. Just wanted to give everyone a head's up :)

Danny had walked straight home after his little breakdown. No way was he staying at school after *that*.

Tucker had been texting him non-stop, skewed lingo and increasingly nonsensical emoji combinations. Seriously, what was crying face-dog-stoplight supposed to mean? Evidently, news of him storming out of class had quickly become Leviathan High's hottest topic.

This, coupled with the dunkee video from last night, probably meant the A-Listers wouldn't be leaving him alone any time soon. Just what he needed; more time in their twisted spotlight.

Grunting, he pressed stop on the microwave before it could hit zero and yanked it open, pulling out a heated Tupperware container full of last week's mac 'n cheese.

He padded through the kitchen into the living room, plopping down on one of the worn couches. His parents didn't like it when he ate in front of the TV, but they were at a conference for the afternoon. Which meant he could eat wherever the hell he wanted.

He stabbed the microwaved meal with a little too much gusto, chewing savagely as he glared at the television.

It was showing some kind of local wildlife documentary, featuring clips of a migrating mother whale and her nine-foot-long calf resting off the Amity coastline.

Not really processing what he was seeing, Danny instead focused on savouring every bite of comfort food that passed his lips. Never had his mom's cooking tasted so. . .good. Weirdly good; his mother was great at a lot of things, but cooking wasn't one of them.

This morning, too. Everything had just tasted really, *really* good.

His stomach growled and he paused his chewing to stare down at it. Danny hadn't been this hungry in years, not since he'd first entered his awkward gangly teenage phase.

Maybe he was finally hitting a growth spurt? Or maybe he had a parasite, like one of those foot long stomach worms he'd seen on a late-night TV special once.

Appetite suddenly lost at the thought of giant stomach worms, he set down his Tupperware container and switched off the television. Danny sighed when his phone pinged again, rattling the coffee table it was resting on. He'd answer Tucker, just. . .maybe after he took a shower and calmed down a little. He still stank like salt and sand and seaweed after all, might as well make the most of his impromptu day off.

The phone buzzed again and Danny could already imagine the headlines being made up by the A-Listers. *Local Teen Has Breakdown: Storms Out of Class Like a Prepubescent Child*, or perhaps, *Resident Goth Makes Wittle Ickle Danny Fenton Cry, More Boring A-Lister News at Six*.

Grimacing, he tossed his fork into the sink and headed upstairs.

The lights of the bathroom seemed too bright, their buzzing sending spears of pain lancing through his skull. Everything just seemed so *bold* today.

Flicking back the curtain, he shed his clothes like a snake would their skin and hopped into the shower, dialing up the water as hot as it would go.

Steam immediately filled the air and he couldn't help the little sigh of contentment that pushed past his lips. The water felt incredible, washing away all the old dirt and stink from the night before.

Everything felt stronger as he stood under its spray, his skin humming with the heat.

Until it didn't.

Until it felt like the flesh was being flayed off his bones.

Pain lanced through his spine, searing so bright and sudden that Danny cursed, pressing a hand to his throbbing skull. Then his jaw was aching, like the worst toothache he'd ever gotten, and his fingers blistered with pain.

"What—?" He barely managed to choke out before his legs were *burning*, burning and flashing with a cold so extreme it felt hot.

He pressed a hand to his chest and—were his ribs *moving?*

Danny may or may not have screamed. Scratch that, he definitely screamed. It was hard not to scream when his bones suddenly decided to go all electric boogaloo inside him.

His legs buckled as his hands flew out to brace his fall. The shower curtain twisted around him, its rails screeching as Danny's collapse brought the whole pole down.

His vision fuzzed white as the pole collided with his head, driving him to the tiled floor. The shower curtain crashed around him as he landed with a sickening *crunch*, his left wrist flaring with hot fire as it bore the brunt of his weight.

Everything ached, stung. Burned like seawater in a cut, like alcohol on a gaping wound.

Ouch, was his last coherent thought before everything went black.

Tucker glanced down at his phone, then back up at the Fenton house in front of him. He'd texted Danny on his way over, but his friend had yet to respond.

Sighing, he tucked the device into his pocket and meandered up the Fenton's path, dodging the spare rusted harpoons and scraps of

discarded netting that littered their lawn.

Danny's parents had always been a little odd, taking their careers as marine biologists extremely seriously, but it wasn't until Jazz drowned at the Amity Pier in Tucker's grade eight year that they'd gone really nutty.

Both parents insisted that their daughter had been taken and killed by a siren. A tailed and finned figure, surfacing out of the waves and dragging their unsuspecting child into the depths.

The official police statement said that she'd drowned in a surfing accident during a solo practice, probably after receiving a head injury from a collision with her board.

Foul play was ruled out, the whole debacle chalked up to tragic circumstance. Her board had gotten tangled in a skimmer's net nearly a week later, but her body was never recovered.

The police moved on to other cases. Jack and Madeline Fenton did not.

No, if anything, her missing body made things worse.

They went from questionably sane marine biologists to absolutely bonkers mer-hunters. Now, they spent their days running a conspiracy theorist blog online and riding the waves in their MAV—Mermaid Assault Vehicle.

Their son stayed home, went to school. Often made and ate his own meals barring the few days a week they were home to feed him.

Tucker had some very choice thoughts on their lackadaisical parenting method, but he tried to keep the peace for Danny's sake. The last thing his friend needed right now was for Tuck to have a falling out with Jack and Maddie over their less-than-stellar adulting.

He knocked a knuckle against the Fenton's door, checking his phone one last time just to be sure. Still no response.

"I'm coming in, Danny!" He called, twisting the handle open. "You better be wearing pants!"

The hall was empty, as was their living room. He dumped his backpack on the linoleum, glancing around the kitchen.

Nothing. No sign of Danny.

He was just beginning to wonder if he should call his friend's parents —though, chances of them knowing where their son was were slim to none—when he heard the shower running.

"Oh," He let out a relieved huff. Crises averted; Danny was just taking one of his impossibly long showers.

"Guess I'll wait here," he said to no one in particular, grabbing a plate from the cupboard. "Might as well raid the fridge while I'm—"

His foot squelched as he moved closer to the stairs, his sock instantly becoming wet. Grimacing, he stepped back, only to notice a steadily growing puddle of water at the base of the steps.

"What the hell?" He watched as more water cascaded down, *drip-dripping* across the kitchen floor.

Was it…coming from the bathroom? Running over from Danny's shower?

But how could it have run over from the tub already? Unless—

A horrible thought sent panic blooming in Tucker's stomach, his legs moving before he even had time to think.

He grasped the railing, taking each step two at a time.

No. Danny wouldn't—he wouldn't have. Although, he had gotten dunked yesterday, and he never reacted well after being in the water.

And then there'd been the whole fiasco after school, which the A-Listers were blowing up into a huge deal, and he hadn't been answering Tucker's texts….

It was almost an exact repeat of what'd happened before, years ago.

When he'd almost lost his best friend to the sting of a kitchen knife

against Danny's wrist under the Fenton bathroom's harsh fluorescent lighting.

He dashed around a corner, ignoring how uncomfortably damp his socks were. Gasping, he launched himself against the bathroom door.

The handle turned, thankfully. Danny must not have locked it, believing himself to be home alone.

The only sound inside was the hum of the shower, water pooling out from under the door and following the warped path of the floorboards downstairs.

For a second, Tucker was tempted to turn back. To call paramedics and wait for them to come.

He didn't want to see what could be on the other side of the door, the way Danny's body would be—

But no, his friend could be hurt in there. Could still be alive. No way would Tucker ever take that chance.

"I'm coming in, man. Please be breathing!"

The door flew open, its hinges squealing, to reveal—

"Holy cheeses!" Tucker startled away from the doorway, hands coming up as if to defend himself.

Because that was *definitely* not Danny.

The shower curtain had been torn down completely, but it did very little to obscure the finned creature tangled in its depths.

"Holy cheese," Tucker said again, placing his hands on the back of his neck. "Holy *cheese*."

The creature—merman—*thing*, he wasn't sure if it was male, but from what he could see of its upperbody he hazarded a guess that it was—had its faced pressed into the floor, shadowed by brilliant, pearlescent hair.

Each strand gleamed with hidden colour, like the alabaster inside of a shell.

It—*his?*—skin was tanned, but had a distinctive shine to it. Like how sunlight appeared on rippled sand under the water.

But that wasn't what had broken Tucker's mind. Oh, no, what'd broken him was the tail.

The thing was hard to see in the buzzing fluorescent light of the bathroom, but it looked extremely real. Too real.

It was mottled black and white, like an emo koi fish, each scale gleaming individually in the lowlight. The bottom fin was mostly white and oddly delicate looking, fanned out on the floor like poured silk. It was impossible, it was insane. It was—*moving*.

The creature let out a low grunt, its hair swaying as if underwater. Then it raised its head, turned towards him, and Tucker screamed.

Later, Tucker would look back on this memory and regret screaming. It really hadn't done either of them any good.

The creature flinched back, hair rippling with the motion as its powerful body spasmed.

And then Tucker was screaming again, because the creature had stolen Danny's face. No, the creature *was* Danny.

His friend was trying to scrabble away from him on his hands, but the massive tail was weighing him down.

A weird warble erupted from Danny's throat as he clapped his hands over his impossibly pointed ears. His scaley, clawed hand. Over angular, pointed ears.

Tucker, realizing his screeching was causing his friend distress—he'd always recognize a distressed Danny, no matter how fishy he looked—immediately stopped, propping his body up against the bathroom counter.

“Danny?!”

The creature—Danny—blinked wide, green eyes at him. They were stark against his tanned skin, which was golden brown where he’d been pale before.

Slowly, when he’d seemed to figure out that Tucker was done being loud, he lowered those wicked looking hands from his ears. “T’hucker?”

His voice sounded wrecked, like his mouth was having trouble forming human words, but there was no doubt that it was his friend speaking.

Even if his mouth did sound oddly full, like he was talking around a toothbrush.

Tucker let out a relieved sigh, sagging against the counter still holding him up. “Danny. It is you. I’m not going to get turned into fish food?”

Those massive eyes turned downward, towards the large tail still half wrapped in the fallen shower curtain. “What the hell is th’at?” Danny whispered, pointing a long finger at his new fishy appendage.

Then he caught sight of the talon-like lope of his finger, realized it was attached to him, and promptly tried to shake it off.

This obviously didn’t work, seeing as it was still very much connected to his body, and he only succeeded in smacking his head against the Fenton’s porcelain tub.

“Oww,” He hissed through his teeth, cradling his no doubt bruising skull.

Tucker could only stare, because there was no doubt in his mind that this was his friend, (no one else would be stupid enough to try and throw their own finger away) but was a little caught up on the fact that *his friend was turning into a fish.*

Had technically *already* turned into a fish. Past tense.

Tucker couldn't decide if that was worse or not.

"What'sth happening?" Danny asked in that guttural, familiar voice, only to frown when his words came out butchered. He peeled back his lips to reveal a massive set of canines jutting out from his upper gums. They gleamed in the light. "Oh. That explainsth the thoothache."

If Tucker hadn't been leaning against the counter, he would've passed out like a corseted actor playing a beseeching Victorian damsel. He almost passed out anyway, corset or not.

"Okay," he said, spreading his hands in front of him just in case his body decided the counter wasn't enough to keep it up. "Okay, okay you've got sharp teeth. And a tail. And different hair and skin and—Danny, what *happened?"*

"I don't know!" His friend tried to sit up again only to collapse backwards, tangling himself even further in the shower curtain.

No matter what shape Danny came in, it seemed his clumsiness was universal.

Tucker huffed amusedly, still not entirely convinced he wasn't hallucinating this. "Do you need some help?"

"…Yes'th."

Giving his friend's deadly looking claws a wide berth (hey, it's not that he didn't trust Danny, he just didn't trust the meat hooks attached to Danny's fingers), he bent down and pulled the shower curtain out from under his fins.

"Danny?" Tucker asked, mouth up against his friend's ear as he untangled him from the curtain.

His heart almost leapt out of his chest when Danny flinched away from him, clawed hands scrabbling ineffectually at the bathroom tile.

Those pointed ears were almost flat against his skull, lips pulled back to reveal razor sharp canines bared in a threatening grimace.

Tucker swallowed, his heart stuttering in his chest as his friend hissed at him. *Oops*.

4. Of Broken Shower Curtains

Summary for the Chapter:

Just a bathroom conversation between two bros!

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter is super dialogue heavy, consider yourself warned! Also drugs are weirdly discussed a lot in this chapter, but no actual drugs appear

Tucker, he was ashamed to say, almost dropped the shower curtain on Danny's head.

"Jeez, man! Warn a guy before you go all feral-mythological-creature on him, yeah? That was terrifying, my heart just *died*." He pounded on his chest, like he could manually restart it that way.

Danny the—merman, Tucker was still not over that part yet—blinked at him, a wrinkle appearing between his brows. "Sorry. That just felt really loud. Like you were yelling in my ear with a megaphone."

Increased hearing, check.

Tucker pushed that very unhelpful thought aside. This wasn't some superhero origin story, just his friend turning into a fish man. Now was not the time to be narrating. Even if current life events would make for a best-selling comic book plot. The kind of comic book that got entire movie universes and kid's cartoons made of it.

Sighing, Tucker got back to work, unplastering the wet curtain from Danny's scaly sides and wrestling it out of the way.

The tail was heavier than he'd expected, his back aching by the time they'd managed to wrangle it out from under the youngest Fenton. Which, speaking of the Fentons, they were going to have a serious problem on their hands if they didn't figure out how to fix this.

"Danny, do you by any chance remember when your parents said they'd be home tonight?" Tucker gave the curtain one last *tug* before

plopping it down onto the bathroom counter.

Danny ran a tongue over his fanged teeth, eyes wide. “I dunno. Why?”

“Well.” How to phrase this so it wasn’t insensitive? “I was just thinking that, you know, they might try to kill you on sight.”

Yeah, that wasn’t what he was going for. Tucker smacked himself with the palm of his hand as Danny’s breath immediately quickened.

“Shoot,” Danny let out a raspy exhale. “Shoot. *Shoot* I didn’t think of that. Tuck, what’re we going to do? They’d gut me first and ask questions later if they saw all. . .this.”

“How about we start with when they’ll be home. Didn’t you say they were at the conspiracy theorist equivalent of a Comic-Con? Like a Conspira-Con? Hey, wait a minute,” he scratched at his chin, “I might be onto something there.”

The dry look Danny gave him was still familiar despite his fishy features. It made something uncoil in the epicentre of Tucker’s chest, the vice of panic around his heart loosening slightly.

This was still Danny, even if he looked like an extra from a mermaid-obsessed teen girl’s wet dream. They would figure this out the same way they figured everything else out; together.

And if they couldn’t figure it out, then they could always run away from their problems. That definitely wouldn’t have any negative consequences. Or swim, in Danny’s case. Or perhaps flop? It’s not like Danny could swim on dry land, so—

“I have a feeling whatever you’re thinking right now is extremely unhelpful,” Danny’s sardonic voice cut through his musings.

“Oh, it was,” Tucker pushed aside the mental picture of Danny flopping around the school like a beached whale. “Very extremely not helpful.”

“They shouldn’t be back till midnight, if not later. Once they didn’t come back till five in the morning,” Danny muttered. “I had to get

myself ready and walk to school."

The familiar bite of disappointed anger Tucker often felt for the Fenton parents flared to life in his chest. He frowned, clenching his fist behind his back where Danny couldn't see it. "How old were you?"

His friend shifted uncomfortably. Tucker knew from experience that Danny hated talking about his parents like this. "I don't know. Eight, nine? Does it matter?"

Tucker sighed, pushing the matter aside for another time.

Danny didn't need him to dissect his homelife right now. What he needed was a solution to their current fishy problem.

"I'll answer that question later, after we've signed you up for some counselling." Tucker was half-kidding. "How about right now we—"

"Does that look normal to you?" Danny asked, sticking his arm up so Tucker could see it. "That wasn't there before, was it?"

Tucker's first instinct was to scoff—*none* of what was happening here looked normal to him—but then he glanced closer at his friend's arm and understood.

The tanned skin had begun to dry, and where it dried, patches of Danny's original, pastier pigment were showing through.

"Am I—" Danny swallowed thickly, those electric green eyes nearly popping out of his face. "Am I *shedding* my *skin?* Am I about to be *skinless?*"

Tucker would've laughed had his friend not been in the process of experiencing an earth-shattering crisis. See, he could prioritize. Sometimes. Occasionally.

Take that, mom.

"I really don't think that's what's happening here, Danny," Tucker said seriously. "I think that as your skin dries…you're turning back to normal. I mean, just look at your pinky finger. It's already starting to

look less Killer Fish Man and more Fleshy Human Phalange."

Danny's hopeful glance was almost enough to shatter Tucker's heart. "D'you really think so?"

"Well, that or you managed to get some kind of merman skin disease despite being fishy for less than," Tucker checked his watch, "twenty minutes."

His friend groaned. "Honestly? With my luck, I wouldn't doubt it. Probably got the ocean equivalent of chlamydia."

Tucker wrinkled his nose. "I think you'd have to bang a fish-person first."

"Ew, Tuck." Danny stuck his tongue out from between his teeth, like the thought alone had left a bad taste in his mouth. "Just—ew."

"Hey man, you started it. But also, your teeth are disappearing."

He clapped a hand over his mouth. "They're what?"

"Disappearing." Tucker motioned at his own very normal, human sized canines. "They're starting to look like mine again."

"Oh, that's good. Right?"

"Unless it's a symptom of ocean-chlamydia, in which case that's very bad."

Danny threw a wet wad of paper towel at him. It stuck to Tucker's skin with a gloopy *glomp* sound. "Shut up."

After that, they didn't have to wait long before Danny's fishy features started receding until a white line of glowing light appeared at his waist.

At this point, Tucker wasn't even fazed anymore. He merely blinked, watching as the line gobbled up Danny's tanned mer-skin and left pale, Danny white-man skin in its wake.

It felt like his brain had temporarily gone on vacation. Anything went

at the moment. His friend was a transforming fish with a white, magical line. His friend had fins. His friend no longer had fins. His friend was also very naked.

“Jeez, man,” Tucker finally snapped out of his daze, clapping a hand over his eyes before the sight of his nude friend could become seared into his retina, “I didn’t ever want to know that much about you.”

He didn’t have to see Danny’s face to know it was probably flushing beet-red right, like when he’d tried to ask Paulina out in fourth grade. “I didn’t know it was going to—I didn’t—shut up!”

“I’m shutting. And also retching internally, because now I know how hairy your—”

Danny clapped his hands over his ears. “*Ohmygod*, Tucker, please stop talking—”

“—legs are. Jeez, man, what’d you think I was going to say?” Tucker mock-gasped, slapping a hand to his chest. “Do you really think so little of me?”

Danny was still struggling to get a towel around his waist, but at least his undesirables weren’t visible anymore. Small victories. “I do. I think so very, *very* little of you, Tuck.”

Tucker stuck his hands into his now-soaked jean pockets. “Honestly, that’s fair. I respect it.”

“Yeah, well,” Danny staggered up to his feet, towel thankfully intact. “I don’t respect you.”

“Again, fair.”

There was silence for a moment as Danny scooped up his clothes, Tucker averting his gaze precautionarily as the towel rode dangerously high on his friend’s thighs. “So, any idea why you’re, ya’know, turning into a supposedly nonexistent creature?”

Danny slipped into a pair of Jazz’s old pajama pants, their once pink fuzz a mottled grey from overuse. Tucker wisely chose not to comment on it; now was not the time for a heart-to-heart.

Later, when there was pizza, he would be forcing a serious heart-to-heart. It'd been too long since either of them had cried over greasy string cheese and old memories.

"Maybe it was just a one-off," Danny yanked a loose sweater over his head, hair sticking up even worse than it usually did. "Like, my mom put something in my eggs that made me hallucinate becoming a mermaid. Or I accidentally got drunk last night. Or I accidentally got *drugged* last night."

"I also saw you turn into a fish too though, and I didn't eat your mom's eggs." Tucker winced. "That sounds like a horrifying euphemism."

Danny made eye contact with him in the mirror, lips screwed up into a disgusted grimace around his toothbrush. "Gwoss, manth."

"Don't trash talk me with a mouthful of toothpaste, I might catch feelings."

He spat into the sink, shooting Tucker a glare. "I said you're gross, man."

"I heard you the first time, jeez. I'm not deaf."

Danny rolled his eyes, then glanced forlornly at the tube of toothpaste in his hand. "Why does my mouth still taste like sea salt? Are there drugs that make your mouth taste like sea-salt, Tuck?"

"You know I don't do that stuff, man. 'Sides, we *both* saw you turn into a fish, and I definitely didn't get roofied at a party last night."

Danny wilted against the bathroom counter. "Ugh, you're right. Although, drugs would explain that weird dream I had last—"

Tucker's head snapped up. "Weird dream? Why didn't you tell me you had a weird dream? Four out of ten hero origin stories start with a weird dream, not to mention—"

Danny glared at him again. Luckily, Tucker had long since become de-sensitized to his friend's nasty looks. "I'm not a hero, Tuck. What would I do anyway, flop passively-aggressively at criminals while

they robbed a bank? Shed my skin with heroic gusto?"

"Ew, man. Keep me out of your weird fantasies."

"Those aren't—" Danny shook his head. "Never mind. Point is, turning into a fish person isn't cool, it's a problem. One that we seriously need to solve before my parents get home."

"You're absolutely right, we shouldn't be making light of this," Tucker said. "But. . .you have to admit, it is kind of cool."

Danny's lips twitched, like he was supressing a smile. "It's a little bit cool."

"See? You get it."

"But also not cool, because my parents are going to come home, smell my fishy-ness, and impale me with a one of those crazy hook things you see in shark movies."

Tucker raised an eyebrow. "A harpoon?"

Danny snapped his fingers at him while tipping his head back, pouring what was probably a lethal dose of mouthwash down his throat. "Excshactly."

"You should really know what a harpoon is, man. Your parents are the absent marine biologists. Mine's just a landscaper."

Danny spat into the sink. "I thought your mom was a pianist?"

Tucker frowned. "Don't say that. It sounds obscene, phallic."

"You're just immature. That's not my problem."

"Even pianists cringe when they have to visit their kid's elementary school classroom on career day," Tucker shuddered, "nothing more brutal than elementary kids."

"You haven't gone through a Christmas at my house." Danny spat again, grimacing at his pale reflection. "Stuff gets nasty."

A vague memory of Danny showing up at his door in a veritable blizzard, wearing a ratty pair of socks, no boots, and false bravado replayed in his mind. He'd stayed over for half the Christmas holidays that year, acting skittish and sheepish around Tucker's parents, like he thought they were going to blow up at him if he so much as breathed wrong.

Tucker would later find out that Maddie and Jack had left to 'cool off' in separate hotels, both believing the other would take care of Danny. "Right. Christmas."

"But you know what the worst thing about all this is?" Danny meets his stare in the mirror again, face screwed up. "My parents were actually right about something."

"Terrifying."

"And if they were right about merpeople being real," he shuddered, "then they could be right about anything. Like me owning too many books, or that I'm too old for glow-in-the-dark stars."

Tucker scoffed, scooping the shower curtain off the counter and examining it hopelessly. He was ninety-nine percent sure these things were suspended by magic and parental willpower alone. "You're never too old for glow-in-the-dark stars. Seriously."

"Still. If they're right about the merpeople, then they might be right about," Danny cleared his throat, gaze dropping to his feet. "Other things."

Tucker stared at him, because *what else could the Fenton parents possibly be right about?* But then it occurred to him.

"Oh. Jazz."

"Yeah," Danny nudged the bathroom cupboard closed with his toe, still not meeting his eyes. "*Jazz.*"

Tucker sighed, the memory of her long, auburn hair flashing through the back of his mind. He could still hear the antagonistic lilt of her voice when she'd chastised them for doing something stupid. It would forever be strange to him that she would stay the same age in his

mind, would stay the same person, while he and Danny got older and older and older. “We still don’t even know if you’re actually a ‘merman’. I think it’s a little soon to assume that—”

“That what, Tucker?” His friend whirled on him with such intensity that Tucker almost took a step back, his hands clenching at his sides. “That my parents were right, and my sister was eaten by *sirens*? Or that my parents are psychotic and passed their crazy genes right down to me?”

Tucker winced, the silence between them only broken by the monotonous whirring of the bathroom fan. “I was *going* to say it’s a little too soon to say that your parents are right about everything.”

Danny deflated like a balloon, an arm flying out to brace his body against the marble countertop. He ran a hand down his face, a sigh tearing out of his chest. “I’m sorry. That wasn’t—I shouldn’t have blown up at you like that. I’m not angry.”

Tucker sighed too. “I’m not angry either, man. This is a weird situation. I get it. But we figure this out together, alright?”

His friend smiled for the first time in what felt like weeks, the expression almost looking out of place on his face. “Yeah,” He bumped his fist into Tucker’s. “Together.”

“Great. Now, I really hate to be ‘that guy’, but we should probably address your weird heroic-origin-story dream. Even if it was just produced by Shroom Studios, talking about it might help.”

“I wouldn’t take shrooms, Tuck,” Danny’s nose creased, his freckles scrunching with the motion. “I’m pretty sure it was just a weird dream. And I already told you about it the other day.”

“Well.” In Tucker’s defense, a lot had happened on the first day of school. “My bad.”

“It’s probably nothing, anyway,” Danny was saying. “Like a—"

“I’ll be the judge of that. Now,” Tucker dropped the shower curtain, ignoring the way it slammed into the floor with an echoing *crash*. “Let’s go dissect your dream before your parents come home and

dissect you."

"You always know just what to say, Tuck. Had me at 'dissect'." Danny dropped his towel next to the shower curtain, similarly disregarding the loud slapping sound caused by the impact. "Man after my own heart."

Tucker slung his arm over Danny's shoulder, helping the still-trembling boy out of the wrecked bathroom. "That's what I like to hear, my friend. That's what I like to hear. You still got that frozen mac'n cheese?"

5. Of Impossible Transformations

Fourteen minutes and one heated discussion about the probability-of-microwaves-causing-cancer later, Danny and Tucker were seated in the living room, Danny perched on the couch that had the best view of the window and Tucker sitting on the floor with a bowl of questionably old shredded cheese.

“It’s disgusting how you eat that,” Danny remarked, his eyes flitting to the window and back again. “Triggers my gag reflex.”

“You wish I’d trigger your gag reflex,” Tucker muttered darkly, stuffing another handful of cheese into his mouth. His mom would rather die than let him do this at home; he could at least take full advantage of Jack and Maddie’s absent parenting while he could.

Danny acted like he hadn’t heard him, gaze fixed on the passing cars outside. “D’you think they’ll come home early? They wouldn’t, right? They never come home early.”

Tucker sighed. “Dude, you’re fine. You don’t even look like a fish right now, so if they did come home early—which they won’t—everything would be okay.”

“I guess,” He shifted against the couch, blue eyes finally dragging away from the sight of the empty driveway outside. At least he was looking at Tucker now, even if he still looked spooked out of his mind.

Small victories, Tucker supposed. Small victories.

“So,” He prompted, shaking the bowl to dislodge as much cheese as he could from its sticky pewter sides. “The weird dream?”

Danny’s grossed-out expression at Tucker’s hedonist cheese-tendencies morphed into a considering one. “I went to a, uh, spot along the beach. With water.”

“*No*,” Tucker said. “Water, on a beach?”

His friend flushed, looking much more like his usual self. “Shut up. At

first, I was just hiding from Dash and the others, but then there was this…sticky stuff? It was green, and kind of light-y."

Tucker nodded imperiously. "Like a cracked glowstick."

"Kind of, only thicker. It led down to the water, so I followed it—"

Tucker almost choked on his cheese. "You *followed* it? Have you ever even *seen* a horror movie before?"

Danny squirmed. "No. You know I don't like horror movies. And besides, I was tired and out of it. Dash had just chucked me into the water like a ragdoll, I wasn't exactly functioning at a hundred percent."

Tucker sobered immediately. "Right, right. Sorry man, keep talking about the thick glowstick-wetness."

"…Let's agree to never call it that again."

"Agreed, now continue."

The story Danny told next was honestly a little hard to believe. If it weren't for him literally turning into a merman in the shower earlier, Tucker definitely would've thought this friend was on something last night.

"So you carried her into the water, and then she just gave you, like, a mermaid blessing?"

"In hindsight," Danny rubbed at the nape of his neck, the motion as subconscious as his breathing, "it certainly seems that way. Like I said, at the time I was a little out of it."

Tucker pointed his cheese-covered finger at the other boy. "It sounds like you got hijinked into mermaiddom. Some real *H2O* type shenanigans."

Danny's nose scrunched like it often did when he wasn't comprehending. His nose was scrunched at school nearly twenty-four-seven. "What?"

“Your lack of pop culture awareness continues to astound me. She turned you into a mermaid.” Tucker waved his hand. “Do you think it’s reversible?”

A horrified look crossed over Danny’s face, like he hadn’t even considered the thought of it not being reversible. “It better be. I mean, if she gave it to me, there’s got to be some way to un-give it to me. Right?”

Danny’s hands clenched in his lap, fingers probably digging into the skin enough for it to hurt.

Tucker was completely out of his depth here, literally, but he knew an incoming anxiety flip-out when he saw one. “I mean, the merperson you got it from sounds very dead, but who’s to say there aren’t others out there? Maybe there’s even a witch-octopus that can reverse-Ariel you, ya’know?”

Danny blinked. “I think so. Is that from the movie with the singing snowman?”

“I changed my mind, I hope you suffer a fishy-death.”

Danny laughed, and Tucker felt the unease in his chest settle slightly at the sound of it. If Danny was laughing, things couldn’t be all that bad.

(Then again, Danny’s panic-response during their last fitness testing in elementary school had also been laughter, so.)

“I’m kidding,” Danny said, interrupting Tucker’s grim thought process. “I’ve seen the *Lion King* before.”

Tucker gasped, throwing his fork at the other boy and missing. The fork landed behind the couch somewhere, but neither boy bothered to get it. “Danny. You’re lack of movie-cultural isn’t a joke.”

“I was *kidding*. I’m like ninety-percent certain I’ve seen the movie you’re referring to.”

“Better have.” Tucker was now regretting throwing his spoon; he had nothing to eat his cheese with. Then he remembered he had hands.

"*The Little Mermaid's* a classic, although it could've done with a little less misogyny and representation of unrealistic body standards."

Danny stared at him. "Maybe you and Manson would get along after all."

"Not a chance, man. I saw that video of what she said to you today; that was seriously uncool of her." Tucker caught his friend's gaze. "It really wasn't okay, okay? I'd chew her out if she wasn't so scary."

"She is pretty scary."

Tucker snapped his fingers at him. "And mean. And uncool."

Danny laughed. "And mean, but even you have to admit she's pretty cool."

"Maybe. So," Tucker set his now empty bowl aside, quickly changing the subject. "I know you aren't going to like what I'm about to say, but just hear me out, alright?"

"Alright."

"I think we should try and make you go mermaid again, just to see if it's really—"

Danny's face darkened, the impressive brows he'd come by honestly from his father flattening into an impressive glare. "Absolutely not."

Tucker puckered into a mock pout. "You said you'd hear me out."

"And I will, but not about this. Not right now." A shudder ran through his body. "It was bad enough the first time. I can't do it again, not today. Not when my parents could walk in the door any minute."

"That's perfectly reasonable, man. Don't get me wrong." Tucker gestured to the glass of water he'd brought in from the kitchen, its surface covered in little bubbles of condensation that were racing each other to the bottom. "But what if we just tried a little bit of water? Like a dip of a finger, or even a toe if you're into that."

Danny grimaced. “Gross, Tuck.”

Tucker held up his arms in a universal ‘back-off’ gesture. “Hey, no kink-shaming here. We could even sprinkle a few drops on your arm, see what happens. Who knows? maybe this whole thing was a one-and-done magical girl transformation and you’ll be back to your powerless, average self in no time.”

The other boy narrowed his eyes at him. “That sounded borderline insulting.”

“No ‘borderline’ about it, man. I was dragging you.”

Danny snorted, but the amusement quickly faded from his eyes as he studied the glass of water again, like the mysteries of the universe were gouged into its chipped rim. “Alright, but only my hand. Okay?”

“Of course, man. We take this at your pace.” Tucker picked up the glass and sidled over to the couch, being extra careful not to prematurely spill any. “How do you want me to do it? Just pour it on?”

“I’ll—” Danny swallowed, the sound thick in the living room’s deafening silence, “you can pour it on, just be careful. Please.”

Tucker nodded, took a bracing breath, and tipped the contents of the cup onto Danny’s hand.

At first, it looked like nothing was happening. Tucker smiled, opening his mouth to say something that probably would’ve been extremely insensitive, only to freeze when the skin that’d gotten soaked began to gain an abalone sheen to it.

It spread, Danny’s skin looking tan as if from a day spent out under a tropical sun. Tucker’s fingers twitched involuntarily as ebony claws began to sprout from his friend’s hands.

They were long, curved, and wicked looking. Just like they’d been under the harsh bathroom light earlier.

Each one seemed to be an extension of Danny’s fingers, like someone

had dipped his hands in ink and it'd run dry halfway up his arm.

There was no doubt about it, Danny's transformation was more than just a one-off.

Danny almost cried when that familiar tingling sensation crept up his arm, burrowing its way into his skin and making his spine shudder.

It was somehow different, this time, watching the transformation take place in the safety of his living room. More vulnerable, like his parents were going to walk in at that very moment, see his hand, and nail him to the carpet with a water-spear.

Harpoon. Whatever it was called.

"Are you seeing this too?" Tucker whispered into the silence, his dark eyes impossibly wide as they studied Danny's hand from wrist to. . .claw tip.

Danny wished he wasn't. Wished he had bad vision, like Tucker did. Wished this was all some nasty hallucination.

He swallowed back the lump in his throat. "Yeah. I don't think it's a one-off, Tuck."

His friend leaned closer, almost at eye-level with Danny's newly incurred talons. "No, I don't think it is. I know you're not going to like this, but that's pretty cool man."

Danny could kind of see it.

He could see how the average high schooler getting mystical powers would be cool, would sound very coming-of-age-drama-y.

Danny, however, was not the average high schooler, and his parents weren't the average coming-of-age-drama parents that would remain oblivious to their child's newfound weirdness due to plot convenience. He was a Fenton, and his parents were mermaid hunters. Nothing about this already messed up situation was average.

That, and though his parents might be oblivious to his teenage

drama, they would notice any mermaid-related drama in a heartbeat.

Tucker sat back, clearly trying to meet Danny's eyes, but Danny couldn't look at him right now. Couldn't look at anything but the newly clawed tips of his fingers.

"What are we going to do?" He murmured, wrapping his non-mystically altered hand around his mystically altered wrist. "I have *school* tomorrow. What about gym? I'll have to sit near a pool. A pool full of *water*."

Tucker snatched Danny's hand back from where it'd started to squeeze a little too hard. "I know there's water in the school pool, Danny. It'll be fine. You're already exempt from swimming, right? You have that note from the school counsellor."

"Right, but what if I get *splashed* and turn all—" He made jazz hands in front of his face, unable to come up with the right words. He did that a lot when he was nervous, hands always fluttering and flapping. He pressed them into his lap.

"Then we'll figure things out from there, okay? I know this is freaky, but freaking out about it won't help anything." Tucker picked up his bowl, backing up because he somehow always knew when Danny needed space. "For now, let's eat. After we'll make a game plan for tomorrow. Sound good?"

Danny nodded, then accepted the hand Tucker offered him.

Tucker didn't even hesitate in wrapping his fingers around Danny's clawed arm, the skin already starting to fade back to its usual pastiness, the black pooling down towards his fingers and turning back into his usual skin tone.

"Yeah," Danny pushed his worries to the back of his mind, focusing on Tucker's grip. "Sounds good."

"Nothing about this sounds good, Tucker. They're going to see me, and then they're going to call a reality TV show and livestream it when curious scientists start dissecting me and making sausages out

of my internal organs, and they'll sell my spleen to the government for—"

"Danny!" Tucker's hand smacked against his mouth, affectively putting a stop to his nervous tirade. "Literally none of that is ever going to happen. 'Sides, even if you did get abducted by mad-reality-TV-scientists or Doctor Phil or whoever, I'd break you out and we'd go on the run together. Yeah?"

"Ughh," Danny smacked his head against the kitchen table, narrowly avoiding faceplanting into the bowl of cereal there. "Sorry, Tuck. I'm being ridiculous."

Tucker stuffed another bite of Lucky Charms into his mouth and chewed like he had a personal vendetta against the pasty pastel marshmallows. "A little bit, but it's cool. No offense. I'm kind of used to it at this point."

Danny groaned again. "That's not helping."

Last night, after testing Danny's hand in the glass of water and eating the Fenton's entire supply of snack-food, the two had vegged out on video games until well after midnight. When Jack and Maddie still hadn't returned, Tucker had borrowed a pair of Danny's oversized pajamas and crashed on his bedroom floor.

Now they were both awake and miserable, watching as the clock slowly ticked towards the time they'd have to leave if they didn't want to be late for school (which Danny honestly wouldn't mind at this point).

"I take it your parents still aren't back?" Tucker asked, mouth finally free of Lucky Charm unicorn-marshmallow jizzum.

Danny glanced at the front door, staring at the empty space where Jack Fenton usually kicked his boots off. "I don't think so. Not unless they used the window again."

Tucker blinked, opened his mouth, then shook his head, "I'm not even going to ask."

"Probably better for your sanity," Danny admitted, glancing at the

digital clock on the stove and wincing. “Are you sure we want to go to school today? What if we faked a fever?”

“You? Fake anything?” Tucker shook his head. “You’re a terrible liar, Danny.”

Another groan. “That’s what I’m worried about. They’re going to smell the mermaid-weirdness on me.”

“That, and it’s only like the second day of a new semester and you already skipped an entire day yesterday. Skip anymore and they’re going to kick you out of the only high school in town.”

Danny had almost forgotten about the whole Samantha Manson incident; merman powers had taken precedent. He frowned, worrying at the edge of his tee shirt with blunt fingernails. “Maybe I can just skip English.”

“With your grades, and with Lancer teaching?” Tucker shook his head. “Bad mojo, man. He’d make a game of hunting you down in the halls, Terminator style.”

“I know. Maybe if I faked my death—”

“I’m going to cut you off right there by saying that’s a terrible idea.”

“*Ugh.*”

Tucker, freshly decked out in Danny’s largest pair of clothes, snatched both their bowls from the table and walked them over to the sink.

Danny moaned and groaned a while longer but was eventually corralled towards the door by Tucker, hands pushing at Danny’s back whenever the other boy tried to dodge away from him.

Then they were heading out the door, shoes untied and clothes questionably clean, towards their inevitable and highly probable doom.

They parted ways at the water fountain, Danny shooting it a

suspicious look as they passed.

He'd never realized how much *liquid* there was everywhere, from the water bottles in people's backpacks to the puddles of mop residue in the bathrooms to the football jock's sweaty brows.

The stuff was everywhere.

A shudder ran its way up his spine as Tucker gave him one last wave, then a thumbs up, then an exaggerated call-me sign, before he almost knocked over another student because he'd been walking backwards while pantomiming at Danny.

Danny bit back a smile and waved as his best friend disappeared around the corner.

Then he stared hopelessly at the space Tucker had just occupied for a moment, feeling panic grow like deadly blossoms in his chest, before squashing down his fear and squaring his shoulders.

He could do this. He was Danny Fenton, and his dad always said the Fenton men never ran from anything.

Except laundry day, but that was a whole other can of phobias.

It was also possibly an example of toxic masculinity, but Samantha Manson wasn't around to point that out. Or Jazz, she'd have a field day on that topic and its 'psychological ramifications'.

Then, as if he'd summoned her by sheer mental discourse alone, Manson rounded the corner wearing massive combat boots and the fiercest frown Danny had ever seen.

He stood there, petrified, until he realized he was standing in the middle of the hallway like a spooked deer about to get mowed down on a freeway.

Almost tripping over his own feet, he quickly threw himself into their shared English classroom, completely by-passed Lancer's disgruntled greeting, and sank down into the same chair as yesterday.

Maybe if he studied his feet very, very hard, she wouldn't

acknowledge his existence and they could carry on mutually ignoring each other.

Sure, Sam was probably the coolest person he'd ever met (aside from that one surfer he used to watch in elementary school, but then everything with Jazz had happened and he'd just. . .stopped), but she also had a mean-streak a mile wide and thought that hanging out with the A-Listers qualified as a good time.

And there'd been that whole fiasco yesterday. So.

She was either insane, cruel, or both.

Probably both.

Danny, so intent on studying his feet, didn't notice that the object of his thoughts was standing in front of him till she cleared her throat.

"Danny?" Her voice was raspy and undeniably cool; it also made Danny undeniably annoyed.

And maybe a little bit nervous, but no one had to know that.

"W—" His voice cracked, and he winced. "What?"

She crossed her arms over her chest, the spider-web print of her mesh sleeves especially prominent against her pale skin. Cool, definitely a cool shirt.

No, *annoying*.

Danny swallowed, eyeing the classroom door while calculating an escape. If he could duck around her and dodge Lancer, then maybe he could—

Samantha, as if reading his mind, slid over to block his view of the exit. "We need to talk."

He felt his heart stutter to a stop in his chest. Well, shoot.

6. Of Pressure and Accidents

Summary for the Chapter:

> In which Danny's fish canines make a reappearance. . .

Notes for the Chapter:

> I HAVE RECOVERED MY DATA!!! My old, practically fossilized computer finally bit the bullet and I had to recover my fics off there before posting any updates, but ehhh everything is safely stored on a back-up hard drive now. I'll hopefully be updating all my fics in the next few weeks :D

“We need to talk.” Samantha Manson was staring down at him, one notched eyebrow tilted at an impossible angle.

Danny contemplated the chances of his survival if he threw himself out their second-story classroom window, found them pretty low, then asked, “. . .Why?”

Her frown deepened, eyes narrowing to slits. She was probably imagining how well his blood would complement the aesthetic of her black high-tops. “I need to—”

Before she could finish, the bell rang overhead, signifying the start of class and (hopefully) Danny’s newfound luck. Samantha shot him a frustrated glare, "Meet me after school, by the bleachers on the left field. Don't be late.

He hid a relieved grin behind his hand as she huffed and slouched off towards her chair. He had zero intention of meeting her. Hopefully if he didn't show, she would forget about the entire thing and finally leave him alone. Manson was still uncomfortably close, only one seat over, but at least she wasn’t looming over him anymore. He was tempted to say a prayer, maybe offer up a piece of old gum as thanks for his sudden change in fate, when the shine of Mr. Lancer’s bald head in front of him heralded impending doom.

“Mr. Fenton,” he drawled, brandishing his attendance sheet like it was a deadly weapon. “So very glad you deigned to attend class this morning. To what do we owe the honour of your esteemed presence?”

The man talked like a sassy English Dictionary would if it had lips. And a tongue. And sentience.

Danny shrugged and ducked down, wishing he could disappear into the wood grain of his desk.

Mr. Lancer huffed, but thankfully turned back towards the board without further commentary.

Dash, who was only just filtering inside the classroom with the rest of the almost-late-because-we’re-too-rebellious-to-arrive-on-time crowd, barked a laugh. “So, the Fen-turd shows his face after skipping yesterday. Did you have to get your mommy to sign your absence slip?”

Danny wasn’t sure how that was supposed to be insulting, since all legal guardians had to sign absence-slips, but he wisely decided to keep that to himself lest Dash try to crucify him with one of Lancer’s red marking pens.

Ignoring how he could feel Samantha’s eyes burrowing into the side of his head, he pulled out his notebook and chewed pencil, dejectedly slapping them against his desk.

Fortunately, he had become adept in forging his mother’s signatures over the years, so the note he handed Lancer at least looked somewhat genuine.

Lancer studied the piece of paper intently, holding it up to the light like he was a club bouncer scanning some low-life’s ID and not a defunct, bald English major with crippling student loans, before *harumphing* and stomping back towards his desk.

“If anyone is going to miss any future classes,” he shot a significant look at Danny, “I would request that they schedule them ahead of time in the main office and notify me personally after class. Now, if

we could get started, please turn to page three-hundred and ninety-four. . .”

Danny tuned him out soon after. English had always been his least favourite subject, and it seemed like that trend would be following him through his high school career.

His eyes wandered the classroom walls, desperately searching for something to capture his flagging attention span, when they unfortunately snagged on Samantha.

Instead of her usual resting scowl, the girl was watching Lancer like there was sunshine shooting out of his mouth instead of meaningless drivel.

Her fingernails, cut short and painted a purple black, wrapped delicately around her pencil as it sailed across the page, navigating the lines and rifts of the paper like they were the crests of a wave.

It was oddly mesmerizing. So mesmerizing that he didn’t even notice she’d stopped scribbling and was staring back until it was too late.

Their eyes met and he flushed—though he had no idea *why* he was flushing; it was just Manson of all people—and he ducked his head back towards his own empty sheet of paper. He should’ve just pulled his gaze away and pretended not to be staring in the first place, or maybe smiled like a normal person. Then she wouldn’t be glaring at him like she was imagining how the pale skin of her fist would look against his face.

Wincing, he kept his eyes firmly fixed on his own paper for the rest of class. When the bell finally rang, he was already slipping past Samantha and out the door, the crush of exiting students pressing her closer to the back as he made his escape.

He ignored the faint sound of her voice calling his name and made his way to his next class, paying no heed to the odd warm sensation unfurling in his gut.

His next few classes passed in a meaningless blur. In fact, Danny was

pretty sure he'd fallen asleep for over half of second period.

No one had even noticed him sleeping, which made him feel extremely pathetic but also served as a blessing in disguise for lessening the packed bags under his eyes.

Once the teacher had dismissed them, Danny was out the door and shuffling towards the lunchroom, kids pressing up against him on all sides. It was uncomfortable, his heart rate ratcheting up as some random girl almost tripped into him.

The cafeteria wasn't much better, and he was abruptly glad for he and Tucker's status as social outcasts; at least it meant their corner lunch table was always empty.

Grinning, he poked at Tucker's hair before collapsing across from him, the rickety bench rattling beneath his weight. "So, how's the second day of school treating you. Run into Blare yet?"

Tucker scoffed, unwrapping one of the cafeteria muffins from its plastic prison. "I said that one time, in like grade four. I wish you'd forget it."

"Hard to forget your imaginary girlfriend, Tuck. Where was she from again?" Danny pretended to think about it. "Istanbul?"

"*Venice*, you jerk. She was from Venice." He pointed a balled-up wad of plastic-wrap at him. "But she was also *imaginary*. I thought we vowed never to talk about it again.

Danny laughed, pulling his own hastily packed lunch out. It was a sad, limp looking burrito he'd put together that morning.

Condensation had gathered alongside it in the container, making it look vaguely wet and incredibly unappetizing.

Maybe he could just go without lunch. That, or—

His stomach growled loudly, loudly enough for Tucker to hear it from his seat across the table. "Dude," Tucker stared at him. "You good? That was like, shifting-tectonic-plates loud. Talk about the rumble heard 'round the world."

Danny swallowed down the lump in his throat and leaned forward. No one was paying attention to them, but it still felt wrong to just blurt out his newly discovered. . .fishy secret.

“I think it’s part of the whole,” his brows creased at the reminder, “’thing’. I’ve been hungry since I transformed last night.”

“Hmm,” Tucker took a massive bite of muffin and chewed it with his mouth wide open like a horse. Danny felt borderline nauseated. “I guess it would make sense. Chances are transforming takes a lot of energy, since you’re basically shapeshifting your entire physique. That, and there’s a possibility you’re sustaining both forms at once.”

Danny paled. “Please don’t tell me I’m going to have to eat weird sea-food when I’m in my weird-sea form. I hate seafood.”

“You’re also allergic to shellfish,” Tucker pointed out, “which is basically all seafood.”

“Exactly,” A shudder ran up his spine at the memory of his first time eating shrimp. He’d spent an entire night in the bathroom battling a horrible rash and bouts of nausea.

Needless to say, it hadn’t been a pleasant experience.

Jazz had held his hand all night as he’d puked his guts out, her nimble fingers keeping his sweaty hair out of the way and rubbing cool cream onto his scratchy wrists.

There was a considering look on Tucker’s face, his hands still systematically shredding his cafeteria muffin to bits before popping it into his mouth. “Maybe we should stop at the store on the way home and pick up some—”

A dark blur whipped past Tucker’s face, missing his nose by a hairsbreadth. The object collided with the wall to their right, bouncing off the painted brick before hitting the floor.

It was a football.

Dread curled awake in Danny’s stomach. If there was a football nearby, that meant Dash wasn’t too far behind it.

Like he'd been summoned by Danny's thoughts, the blond quarterback materialized next to Tucker with a storm cloud expression on his face.

"Foley," he bit out, light eyebrows narrowed dangerously. "Why the hell did you touch my ball?"

Tucker winced away from the larger boy's looming presence, hands raised in a defensive gesture, "I've never touched your balls, man."

Had the situation not been so dire, Danny would've facepalmed.

Dash flushed. "Shut up," he snapped, "you ruined my ball."

Danny glanced at the downed football. "Your ball looks fine, Dash. Tucker didn't touch it. Calm down."

Rookie mistake. Telling Dash to calm down was like throwing a red-themed birthday party in front of a raging bull.

Dash's gaze pinned Danny to the cafeteria bench like he was a particularly ugly beetle. "Don't talk, Fenturd. This is just between me and your little friend here."

Danny frowned. "It does involve me when you come over and ruin our lunch with your posturing. Ask anyone in the cafeteria, the ball *you* threw didn't even touch Tucker." He crossed his arms. "And you better be glad it didn't. You could've taken his head off."

With Dash's attention successfully diverted, Tucker was able to slide out of the blonde's reach. He shot Danny a very pointed *What are you doing?* expression.

The jock suddenly reared forward, slamming his unopened plastic water bottle down as he *slid* across the cafeteria table towards Danny.

Slid. Like a character in some low-budget action movie would slide over the hood of a sportscar. Danny was vaguely impressed until Dash's fist was abruptly flying towards his face.

It seemed slower than usual, like Dash's arm was moving through water, or molasses, but still not slow enough for Danny to dodge.

Dash's knuckles collided with the right side of Danny's jaw, splitting against the skin and sending a spattering of blood onto the cafeteria tiles. Danny's body lurched sideways off the bench as he barely managed to catch himself on the edge of the table. He'd bit his tongue, the source of the blood, and had to spit out a thick glob of it before he choked.

Something simmered in his gut as stars spun behind his eyes, vision darkening at the edges. He felt angry, overwhelmed. His jaw was aching, skin smarting at both the unexpected contact with another person and the physical paint of getting *punched in the face*.

He wanted Dash to leave them alone, for Samantha to leave him alone. For the whole *school* to leave them alone. His lips pulled up into a snarl as he blinked the encroaching darkness out of his vision. *Why couldn't everyone just—*

The strange tension in his gut released and the entire cafeteria *exploded*.

The cafeteria, in fact, did not explode.

But all the water inside it did. Which, don't get him wrong, was still a very dramatic and loud event.

Tucker raced around the table in the pandemonium, not taking the shortcut that Dash had (likely not athletic or confident enough to try it) and grabbed Danny under his shoulders.

His hands dug into the tendons there, causing Danny to wince as the other boy heaved him to his feet and started helping him towards the cafeteria door.

"What happened?" His tongue felt fuzzy against the roof of his mouth, probably from when he'd bitten it, and—and why were his feet wet?

He glanced down, only to see that he'd stepped in a large puddle of water.

Squinting, he tried to recall why there'd be water on the cafeteria

floor. A janitorial job gone bad? Flooding? It was also raining, which didn't seem normal. Then Tucker was pulling him out through the cafeteria's wide double doors and towards the men's bathroom.

It was only then that Danny realized the puddles were coming from the sprinkler system above, the little streamers spitting cold water as the kids in the cafeteria screamed and hustled to cover up their backpacks or hairdos.

"Thucker?" That wasn't how his tongue worked. He cleared his throat. "T-u-cker?" There, that was a bit better. It felt like there was something in his mouth, more than just his steadily bleeding tongue.

Tucker glanced at him, before cursing and slapping a hand over Danny's lips. "Keep your mouth closed, dude. You look like a discount Dracula right now."

Discount Dracula?

Then it hit him.

His powers. The stupid fangs.

Gasping, he yanked his hand out from where it had gotten sandwiched under Tucker's arm and seized the tip of his ear.

Sure enough, it had elongated into a subtle point.

He'd assumed the odd starburst of nerves and pain all over his body were a side effect of Dash's punch, not his new abilities manifesting again.

Suddenly feeling significantly more cognizant, he straightened and leaned into Tucker's support as the boy staggered with him into the men's bathroom. He felt like a clumsy four-legged beast as he and Tucker nearly tripped over each other. That, or two overeager potato-sack racers.

He wasn't sure which comparison was worse, honestly.

The overhead sprinklers were going off in the bathroom, too, but Tucker kicked a stall door open and practically tossed himself and

Danny inside.

Danny slouched against the wall, throwing an arm up to keep himself from falling over while Tucker flipped the lock into place and put his hands on his knees, gasping for air.

“I have never moved,” he gasped, “that fast, in my entire life.”

“Not effen—” Danny frowned, pulling his lips back to talk better around the jagged canines protruding from his gums. “Not even during Tetslaff’s drills?”

He scoffed. “*Especially* not during Teslaff’s drills. Are you kidding me? Imagine if I got recruited for the track team.” Tucker shuddered, wrapping his arms around his wet upper body. “It’s freezing in here.”

“Really?” Danny frowned. “I don’t feel anything.”

Tucker shot him a dry glare. “Yeah, well we can’t all be magical fish people, Danny. Some of us still experience a bit of mortal chill.”

Danny snorted. “My bad.”

“Yeah,” Tucker slid down the stall wall until he was hunched over his knees but still not touching the bathroom floor. Who knew what teenage horrors lurked on that dingy tile. “That was crazy. That was *insane*. Did that even happen? You soaked *Dash*, man. You soaked the whole school!”

“I did?”

Tucker looked at him like he was off his rocker, which was fair. Danny often thought he was crazy too. “Danny, after Dash punched you, his water bottle just exploded in his face. Everyone’s water did. The cafeteria lady was screaming bloody murder. Then the sprinklers went off. No way was that a coincidence.”

Danny winced. “We could pretend it was?”

“No, Danny, we really can’t.” Tucker grabbed a wad of toilet paper and started mopping at his dripping face. “For starters, it was way too cool to ignore. And secondly, what if it happens again? We can’t

have you just exploding things every week. People will get suspicious."

"Suspicious of what? The school's pipes?"

"No, *conspiracy theory* suspicious." Tucker tossed the now drenched wad of toilet paper on the ground before grabbing some more for his lost cause of a shirt. "*Lizard people* suspicious. The kind of people your parents have their mad-hatter afternoon teas with."

"Hey," Danny's frown deepened. "They're not crazy."

Tucker paused in his swabbing, tilting his head to stare up at him. Danny must've looked extra pathetic under the flickering fluorescent bathroom light, Tucker stared at him for a moment before eventually nodding. "Sorry, man. You know I don't think they're crazy either."

The tension in Danny's shoulders eased, slumping against the graffitied wall of the bathroom stall. Someone had drawn such an incredibly anatomically incorrect penis there that Danny genuinely thought it was some kind of fish at first.

"Now what?" He asked. "I can't just hide in the bathroom every time something goes wrong. Although maybe if I faked having bowel problems—"

"I'm gonna stop you right there, Danny." Tucker pointed a ball of toilet paper at him. "Start drying off, it helps your fishiness go away faster."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Ever. I mean it."

Danny laughed, then immediately cut the sound off when he almost stabbed himself in the face with a half-formed claw.

"Oh, yeah, careful. Your hands are sharp," Tucker warned belatedly.

"Thanks," Danny said again, though it sounded significantly drier this time.

He rubbed an already damp roll of toilet paper over his face, feeling more like he was spreading the water around than actually achieving anything.

Sighing, he dropped it into the steadily growing pile on the floor between them only to look up and catch Tucker staring at him oddly.

“What?” Danny asked, a little self-consciously. He felt the top of his head to make sure he hadn’t sprouted horns or grown another skull. He’d turned into a fish yesterday, who knew what other mythological animals were on the table now. Maybe he’d transform into a deer-man next and Dash could turn him into roadkill.

“I was thinking—”

“Never a good start,” Danny interrupted, dropping his hands into his lap only for them to squelch against a sheet of damp toilet paper. He grimaced. “Gross.”

Tucker flipped him off without breaking stride, “—that we should probably, you know.”

Danny stared at him, waiting for the punchline. “No, Tucker, I don’t know. Telepathy didn’t come with the whole ‘fish person’ subscription package.”

He sighed. “You aren’t going to like this.”

“Just shoot, Tuck. Nothing you say could make me hate you.” He thought about it. “Actually, there’re a few things you could say that would make me hate you, but they’re all wildly out of character.”

Tucker looked vaguely complimented. “Thanks man.”

“No problem.”

They bumped fists over their little toilet paper mountain.

“I think you should try training your abilities,” Tucker said without preamble. “If accidents like the one today keep happening, people could get suspicious. Or you could get hurt.”

“Yeah, I don’t like that.” Tucker sputtered, but before he could say anything in his defense Danny continued, “but I do think you’re right. Since we don’t know how long I’ll be stuck like this,” he waved a clawed hand in the air, “I think it’d be best to know the extent of my powers and how to control them.”

Tucker mimed wiping away a tear from the corner of his eye. “They grow up so fast.”

“Shut up.” Danny glanced down at his hands, which were slowly but surely returning to their normal, non-clawed pinkness. Finally.

“But where can we go?” Tucker mused.

They both knew, without having to say anything, that the ocean was off-limits.

If Danny could hardly handle Dash throwing him into the waves the other day, there was no way he could handle learning about his new fish powers there.

Danny shuddered, shaking off the cloying feeling of salt water as he watched the black stain on his arms creep down to his fingers like ink getting soaked up after a bad spill. His usual pigmentation was left behind, the dark whorls disappearing.

“It has to be somewhere people can’t see us,” he said, tearing his gaze away from his arm. “And have a big enough body of water for practicing in.”

They stared at each other for a moment, minds blank, before it occurred to them both simultaneously—the school pool. They grinned at each other fiercely. It was perfect.

“Now we just need a plan,” Tucker said, still smiling. “And I think I have the perfect thing in mind.”

7. Of Half-Hashed Scheming

Summary for the Chapter:

> Danny and Tucker run from Samantha. Danny confronts some Thoughts he's been having about this whole Fish Man thing.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Mild CW for a panic attack and accidental bodily harm closer to the end of the chapter, it's very mild and non-descriptive but I still want to let yall know :) take care of yourselves <3
>
> Also, on a much more exciting note, we got fanart!!! It was linked in the comments of chp5, but the rest of frostypine's creations can be viewed at FrostyPine's Insta (fingers crossed that the link works!!)
>
> Now onward to the chapter and all its angsty glory~

By the time Danny finally dried off enough to stop looking so. . . fishy, the principal had already made an announcement over the loudspeakers.

Because of the burst pipes throughout the school they were cancelling classes for the day and sending all students home. "*Please just go*," she intoned over the intercom system. *"I don't get paid nearly enough to deal with this."* Before the intercom turned off, the microphone picked up what sounded like a cursing teacher in the back of the staff room.

Beside him, Tucker snorted as he poked his head out of the bathroom door. "I swear she's going to quit any day now. Alright, looks like the coast is Dash-clear. I say we make a break for it."

"Are you sure I'm not still," Danny glanced at himself in one of the cracked mirrors. "Ya'know."

"Looking like a middle-school girl's aquatic finned fantasy?" His friend glanced back at him, quickly looking Danny up and down

before sticking his head back out the door. “Nope. You just look like plain old Danny Fenton.”

Danny sputtered. “Plain old?”

“Don’t make me repeat it.”

He followed Tucker out the door, still muttering under his breath about ‘plain old’. “I really don’t think I’m all that plain, I’m much more unique than the other guys,” he said, slipping into stride beside Tucker as they headed towards the school’s wide foyer. “Remember my birth mark? That’s not something a plain person has.”

Tucker turned his head towards him, mouth opening around what was no doubt a sharp quip, when his eyes suddenly widened in fearful surprise.

Abruptly, he snatched at Danny’s shoulders and started dragging him through the crowd of drenched students. “Don’t look now, but we’ve got a tail.”

“A tail?” Danny asked, panicking while he swung his head downwards. “But I’m dry!”

Tucker snorted again. “Not that kind of tail. Someone’s following—”

“Fenton!” A low, feminine voice echoed through the hall, drawing the attention of any lingering students.

Danny spun around, almost tripping in Tucker’s grip, only to see Samantha Manson on a warpath towards him.

“Oh,” Danny cursed, frozen for a moment under the weight of Samantha’s amethyst glare. He wrenched his head away, turning to look at Tucker with wide eyes. “What do we do?”

Tucker, apparently the more adept of them when it came to avoiding awkward social situations, wisely said; “We run.”

“Fenton!” Samantha called again, this time her voice sounding much closer as she elbowed a senior out of her way. The boy stumbled, whipping around to no doubt chew out whoever had dared push him

over, only to catch sight of Samantha and immediately snap his mouth closed.

Danny swallowed; she was *terrifying*. “Good idea.”

And run they did, apologizing to any students who weren’t fast enough to get out of their way.

“Sorry!” Danny called as he nearly bowled a red-headed freshman over.

The door loomed before them, Tucker slamming into the push-bar as he rocketed out into the sunlight. Danny followed on his heels, slipping through the door before it creaked closed behind him.

Risking a glance over his shoulder, he saw Samantha collide run into the door with an audible *thwack* sound.

She recovered way too quickly if you asked Danny, shooting him a venomous glare through the clear glass like her lack of spatial awareness was entirely his fault.

Maybe it was. Again, Danny swallowed.

She was just so damn scary.

He gave her an apologetic smile (that absolutely wasn’t sincere) and a tiny wave (also, not sincere) before following after Tucker, their semi-damp shoes slapping soggily against the pavement.

With the hot coastal sun beaming down on them, they’d dry in no time. Wind rushed in Danny’s ears as he ran, carrying the salty tang of the sea past his nose. He felt the smile on his lips twist into something a little more genuine and stretched his arms out at his sides as they ran. He laughed, the absurdity of everything catching up to him even as he started to sweat from running so hard. He’d just turned into a mer-creature in the school bathroom and now they were running from a Goth freshman. Life was insane.

He felt good. Really good, despite the circumstances.

They only slowed once the school was out of sight, their chests

heaving from the effort of running for so long. Although, Danny noticed, he felt significantly less winded than he usually would've after running like that.

Now was that because of the mermaid powers, or the early morning jogs he'd started going on during their summer break?

Tucker staggered onto the grass of someone's lawn, plopping down as he sprawled onto his back. "Dude. I have run *way* too much today. My shins are crying."

"Your shins don't have tear ducts." Danny joined him, legs flying out in front of him as he collapsed onto the grass. He placed a hand over his chest, feeling the wild beating of his heart. "How is one person so malevolent?"

"I dunno man," Tucker heaved himself over onto his side, cushioning his chin in the palm of his hand as he stared at Danny. "You're like, bright red."

"I am?" Danny frowned, pressing a hand against his cheek. It didn't feel flushed. "I don't feel hot. Maybe it's from all the running."

Tucker was looking at him weird. "If you say so."

Danny squinted up at the sun, wondering if he had enough energy to be offended by Tucker's disbelieving tone.

Did he think Danny hadn't run as hard as him or something? Or maybe he thought Danny was coming down with a fever? He shook his head. He'd worry about Tucker's nonsensical intentions later. "Put any thought into your grand master plan yet?"

Immediately, the other boy brightened. "Yes," Tucker bolted upright. "I've thought it all out. You know the windows in the school pool area?"

. . .Danny had an incredibly bad feeling about this. "Yes."

"D'you think you could fit through them?"

He shot Tucker an incredulous look. "We are not breaking into the

school through a *window,* are you kidding me? Those things are like ten feet off the ground."

"And? You've never heard of a ladder?"

Danny stared at him. "Let me get this straight, you want to—"

Tucker limped his wrist, grinning and waggling his eyebrows suggestively.

Danny rolled his eyes. "Fine, let me get this *clear*. You want to walk to the school with a seven-foot ladder in the dead of night, somehow get the window open, somehow get inside without hurting ourselves, use the pool, and somehow get out again, all without getting caught?"

Tucker made finger guns at him. "Exactly."

"You can't be serious."

"Well," he rubbed at the nonexistent facial hair on his chin. "When you put it like that, it does sound a little silly."

Danny snorted. "A little."

"Okay!" Tucker threw his arms out. "It's ridiculous. You got anything?"

Danny technically did have an idea. A very half-hashed, possible disastrous idea that could potentially land him in remedial counselling sessions again if it went wrong. "Uh, I might. I'd like to think of it more as a last resort though."

Tucker sighed, flopping back into the grass again. "Well, better than nothing I guess. Whaddya say we head back to your house and scheme over some radioactive leftovers."

"I like the way you think."

"But we could also lay here for five more minutes," Tucker said. "My legs feel like jelly. Look at them, they're trembling."

Danny craned his neck to look down at his friend's legs, noting a distinct lack of trembling in them. "I think they're trembling under the weight of all that BS you shoulder, man."

Tucker's neck snapped towards him, mouth pulling open, only to be interrupted by the slamming of a nearby door.

"Hey!" An echoing, male voice yelled, shattering the peaceful ambience of the moment like glass. "What the hell are you doing on my grass?"

Danny blinked once at Tucker, who blinked back, eyes huge.

The front door slammed again, this time letting through the massive shape of hulking, bearded man wearing a pink apron as he brandished a wooden spoon in one hand. "I said scram, kids! Can't you read the sign?"

They both glanced at the white picket sign beside them, which was written in what looked like Dutch.

"No!" Danny called back.

"Dude," Tucker whispered. "He's huge."

Danny nodded. "He's totally gonna kill us."

"Hey!" The man yelled, stomping down the steps towards them. Where his muscles weren't covered by denim, they bulged impossibly in the sunlight. "I asked you a—"

"Run?" Danny asked, feeling his legs quiver in response.

Tucker sighed. "Run."

And so they did, the man shouting obscenities after them as they booked it down the street.

Tucker laughed, flipping the man off as they disappeared around the corner. For the first time in weeks, Danny felt lighter than the sea air around them.

His good mood lasted for a record breaking thirty minutes.

“Please don’t do that. For the love of all things good please don’t do that.”

“Wharthdomean?” Tucker asked, mouth full of leftover pizza, pickle, and mayo. “Itthastesthood.”

“I can’t understand you.” Danny grimaced as Tucker swallowed. “Actually, I don’t even want to understand you. Our friendship is officially over.”

Tucker wiped his hand on a suspiciously unclean napkin. Danny wouldn’t be surprised if it’d been sitting on the table since the foundations of the house were laid down. “I said it tastes good. You should try it.”

He took another bite of his vile combination before offering it to Danny, mayo dripping from between the two slabs of pizza pressed together like a sandwich from hell.

Danny felt his lip curl at the sight. “No thanks.”

Tucker shrugged. “Suit yourself, more for me.”

Danny wasn’t actually (that) disgusted with his friend’s strange eating habits anymore. He’d been desensitized after their last trip to an ‘all you can eat’ buffet.

It’d been a nightmare.

He was pretty sure Tucker was banned from at least half the restaurants in town, and he couldn’t even blame them.

The boy was a menace.

“So I was thinking, if we rented a helicopter—”

Danny held his hand up. “I’m gonna stop you there and remind you that we are *high school students.* We can neither rent nor navigate a helicopter.”

“Nor”, Tucker mocked him, grinning around a maw full of sandwich. “*Nor*. Look at me, I’m Danny Fenton and I use big words like ‘nor’ and blush when girls chase me away from the school.”

Danny flushed. “Shut up.” He scribbled the misspelled ‘hellcopter’ off Tucker’s planning list, then quickly scratched over Tucker’s hastily written ‘420’ and ‘696969’ too just to be safe.

He wasn’t risking any ideas spawning from either number combination.

They tried to brainstorm a few more ideas but didn’t come up with anything better than ‘blackmail the night janitorial staff’, which Danny figured wouldn’t work for several reasons.

The least of those being they didn’t even know if Leviathan High *had* any night staff.

Tucker smacked his lips together, the sound echoing throughout the Fenton kitchen. “Well, I’m stumped,” he said, cleaning his hands on the napkin and leaning back in his chair. “Videogames?”

Danny grinned. “Videogames.”

The booted up the console, swapping insults and random bits of gossip that they’d overheard at school.

Zero homework got done, but they did manage to level up at least six ranks only to get crushed by an overpowered boss.

Danny’s parents didn’t come home that night, either, but his mom did shoot him a message via text.

The Mominator: conference trip was extended. we’ll be back late tomorrow night. Love you <3

Danny stared at his too-bright screen, blinking the sleep out of his eyes. The dark house seemed to press at his sides, the emptiness of it far too loud in the silence.

Tucker had gone home hours ago, although he’d offered to stay till Danny’s parents showed up. Danny had convinced him to go home

before Tucker's mom voluntold the entire town into searching for her 'missing' son. She'd done it before, when Tucker and Danny decided to marathon a show for an entire weekend and forgot to text her proof of life.

Swallowing back whatever emotion was trying to claw its way up his throat, he tapped out a quick, *sounds good* in response to his mom's text before pressing send and swiping out of her contact.

He squinted, finger hesitating above Tucker's profile, before he clicked the device off and slid it back onto the counter.

It wasn't until he'd started washing his and Tucker's dishes from before, sticking his hands into the sudsy water as he absently soaped up a cloth, that he remembered his predicament.

His fingers tingled as claws elongated past the crest of his skin, black creeping up his hands before fading into a bone, abalone-white towards the elbow.

He cursed, almost dropping an entire plate on his foot in surprise.

Quickly, he glanced around the kitchen, feeling like his parents were about to jump out and stick him with a harpoon. Maybe dice him into sushi.

It wasn't that he thought they'd actually hurt him. It was more just. . . the possibility of them not recognizing him that terrified Danny.

(Or, if they recognized him and harpooned him anyway. If they loved the idea of catching a scientific discovery more than they loved their son. More than they loved Danny.)

The room remained empty, but the thick, paranoia-induced sweat on the nape of his neck didn't go away.

If anything, it got worse.

Danny stumbled back from the sink, stretching his hands out in front of him so he didn't accidentally catch his claws on anything. The last thing he needed was for his parents to come home and see talon-marks scratched into their marble countertop. That would *really* set

the conspiracy side of them off.

Abruptly, the kitchen felt entirely too large.

He sucked a breath in, feeling his pulse hammer against the skin of his neck. He needed—he needed to—

Danny tucked himself under the table, pulling his knees as close to his torso as he dared. His pinky claw caught on his jeans, but he pulled it away before the material could tear.

He rested his chin on the crux of his knee and closed his eyes, fingers tightening against his wrists. The claw tips dug gently into the skin there, but if he kept them out of the way at least he wouldn't damage anything with them.

His heartbeat thudded in his chest. He counted to four, over and over again, until he lost track of the seconds ticking by on the kitchen clock. His heartbeat began to slow, his breathes evened out.

Danny wasn't sure how long had passed before he risked opening his eyes again, but it was long enough for the last rays of the sun to set and for his transformation to fade.

When he glanced down, worried he'd find a whole mermaid-ified hand again—that maybe, this time, things had been permanent—he was relieved to find nothing but smooth human skin.

He sighed, peeling his fingers off his wrist and stretching his legs out in front of him. There were halfmoon indents from his claws, but even as he watched they began to stitch themselves together across his skin. Huh. He might have to add 'accelerated healing' to that list of powers Tucker was talking about.

They tingled, blood rushing back to his feet after being curled up for —however long it'd been.

Getting out from under the table proved a lot more difficult than getting under it, but he managed to extricate himself without bashing his skull open.

Serious injuries would mean going to the hospital, and who knew

what would show up on his X-ray. Extra bones? The skeleton of a tail fused with his legs?

He shuddered at the thought.

Eventually, the quiet of the kitchen forced him into action again. His phone pinged with a message, no doubt his mom responding or Tucker sending a random out of context GIF, but Danny ignored it.

Finding his mom's rubber cleaning gloves turned out to be a lot more difficult than it should've been, and he almost dumped a massive, tangled ball of netting on his face (why was that even in their closet in the first place?), but eventually he found a pair of elbow length monstrosities.

They were a bright, eye-scorching orange, but they'd do for now.

After pulling them on, he finished up with the dishes, keeping the water pressure low and avoiding washing any spoons.

He did *not* want to get splashed again.

Then he made himself a measly supper of old Chinese food and went to bed, purposefully ignoring the closed door next to his.

He'd been avoiding it like the plague, not ready to face the perfectly made bed, unused graduation gown, and dusty Psych 101 textbooks he'd find inside. As far as he knew, all of Jazz's stuff remained untouched, like it was just waiting for her to come back and slip back into the life she'd been building.

Danny slid into his second softest pair of pyjamas, forgoing a shirt entirely, and collapsed onto the mattress. He was asleep within minutes, his phone lighting up one last time as he slipped into unconsciousness.

He wouldn't see the message until tomorrow morning:

TucktheBuck: my mom says u can come over if your parents aren't back tomorrow. see ya tomorrow man (⌐ ■ _ ■) – □ □□ □ sweet fishy dreams~~~